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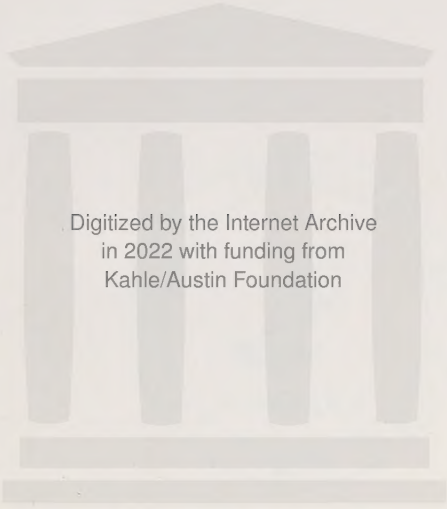
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Geo. Dr. L. Bolton

AN ESSAY

ON

POETRY AND MUSICK.

PART II.

OF THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY.

HAVING finished what I intended to say on the general nature of poetry, as an imitative art, I proceed to consider the INSTRUMENT which it employs in its imitations; or, in other words to explain the general nature of POETICK LANGUAGE. For *language* is the poet's instrument of imitation, as *sound* is the musician's, and *colour* the painter's. My conclusions on this part of the subject will be found to terminate in the principles already laid down.

Words in poetry are chosen, first, for their *sense;* and, secondly, for their *sound*. That the first of these grounds of choice is the more excellent, nobody can deny. He who in literary

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matters prefers sound to sense, is a fool. Yet sound is to be attended to, even in prose; and in verse demands particular attention. I shall consider poetical language, first, as SIGNIFICANT; and, secondly, as SUSCEPTIBLE OF HARMONY.

CHAPTER I.

Of Poetical Language, considered as significant.

IF, as I have endeavoured to prove, poetry be imitative of nature, poetical fictions of real events, poetical images of real appearances in the visible creation, and poetical personages of real human characters; it would seem to follow, that the *language of poetry* must be an imitation of the *language of nature*. For nothing but what is supposed to be natural can please; and language, as well as fable, imagery, and moral description, may displease, by being unnatural. What then is meant by *natural language?* This comes to be our first inquiry.

SECTION I.

An idea of Natural Language.

THE term *natural language* has sometimes been used by philosophers to denote those tones of the human voice, attitudes of the body, and

configurations of the features, which, being *naturally* expressive of certain emotions of the soul, are universal among mankind, and every where understood. Thus anger, fear, pity, adoration, joy, contempt, and almost every other passion, has a look, attitude, and tone of voice, peculiar to itself; which would seem to be the effect, not of men imitating one another, but of the soul operating upon the body; and which, when well expressed in a picture or statue, or when it appears in human behaviour, is understood by all mankind, as the external sign of that passion which it is for the most part observed to accompany. In this acceptation, *natural language* is contradistinguished to those articulate voices to which the name of *speech* has been appropriated; and which are also universal among mankind, though different in different nations; but derive all their meaning from human compact and *artifice*, and are not understood except by those who have been instructed in the use of them. But in this inquiry the term *natural language* denotes that use of speech, or of *artificial language*, which is suitable to the speaker and to the occasion. " Proper words in " proper places," is Swift's definition of a good style; and may with equal propriety, serve for a definition of that style, or mode of language,

which is here called *natural*, in contradistinction, not to *artificial* (itself being artificial) but to *unnatural;* and which it is the poet's business to imitate. I say, *to imitate:* for as poets (for a reason already given) copy nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection, wherein consistently with verisimilitude, and with the genius of their work, it may be supposed to be; and are therefore said to *imitate* nature, that is, to give a view of nature similar to, but somewhat different from the reality: so, in forming poetical language, they must take for their model human speech, not in that imperfect state wherein it is used on the common occasions of life, but in that state of perfection, whereof, consistently with verisimilitude, it may be supposed to be susceptible.

But, as we cannot estimate the perfection or imperfection of poetical imagery, till we know the natural appearance of the thing described; so neither can we judge of this perfection of human speech, till we have formed some idea of that quality of language which we express by the epithet *natural.* That some modes of language are more natural than others, and that one mode may be natural at one time which at another would be unnatural, must be evident even to those who never studied criticism. Would soft words, for example, be natural in

the mouth of a very angry man? or do even the vulgar expect blustering expressions from him who melts with pity or love or sorrow? Between groans and pain, tears and grief, laughter and jocularity, trembling and fear, the connexion is not more natural, than between certain sentiments of the human mind and certain modifications of human language.

Natural language and *good* language are not the same: and Swift's definition, which is equally applicable to both, will not perhaps be found to express adequately the characteristick of either. The qualities of good language are perspicuity, simplicity, elegance, energy, and harmony. But language may possess all these qualities, and yet not be natural. Would the Anacreontick or Ovidian simplicity be natural in the mouth of Achilles, upbraiding Agamemnon with his tyranny and injustice; or of Lear defying the tempestuous elements, and imprecating perdition upon his daughters? Would that perspicuity which we justly admire in Cato's soliloquy,* be accounted natural in Hamlet's, † by those who know, that the former is supposed to speak with the rationality of a philosopher, and the latter

* It must be so. Plato, thou reason'st well, &c.

† To be, or not to be, &c.

with the agitation of a young man tortured to madness with sorrow and love, disappointment and revenge? Would language so magnificent as that in which the sublime Othello speaks of the pomp and honours of war, be natural in the mouth of the soft, the humble, the broken-hearted Desdemona bewailing her unhappy fate? Or would the sonorous harmony of the dithyrambick song or epick poem, suit the simplicity of shepherds, contending in alternate verse, and praising their mistresses, putting forth riddles, or making remarks upon the weather? Yet language must always be so far simple as to have no superfluous decoration; so far perspicuous, as to let us see clearly what is meant; and so far elegant, as to give no ground to suspect the author of ignorance, or want of taste.

Good language is determinate and absolute. We know it wherever we meet with it; we may learn to speak and write it from books alone. Whether pronounced by a clown or a hero, a wise man or an idiot, language is still good if it be according to rule. But natural language is something not absolute but relative; and can be estimated by those only, who have studied men as well as books; and who attend to the real or

supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the import of what is spoken.

There are several particulars relating to the speaker which we must attend to, before we can judge whether his expression be natural. It is obvious, that his *temper* must be taken into the account. From the fiery and passionate we expect one sort of language, from the calm and moderate another. That impetuosity which is natural in Achilles, would in Sarpedon or Ulysses be quite the contrary; as the mellifluent copiousness of Nestor would ill become the blunt rusticity of Ajax. Those diversities of temper which make men think differently on the same occasion, will also make them speak the same thoughts in a different manner. And as the temper of the same man is not always uniform, but is variously affected by youth and old age, and by the prevalence of temporary passions; so neither will that style which is most natural to him be always uniform, but may be energetick or languid, abrupt or equable, figurative or plain, according to the passions or sentiments that may happen to predominate in his mind. And hence, to judge whether his language be natural, we must attend, not only to the habitual temper, but also to the *present passions*, and even to the *age* of the speaker. Nor should we overlook his

intellectual peculiarities. If his thoughts be confused or indistinct, his style must be immethodical and obscure; if the former be much diversified, the latter will be equally copious. The *external circumstances* of the speaker, his rank and fortune, his education and company, particularly the two last, have no little influence in characterising his style. A clown and a man of learning, a pedantick and a polite scholar, a husbandman and a soldier, a mechanick and a seaman, reciting the same narrative, will, each of them, adopt a peculiar mode of expression, suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and to the language he has been accustomed to speak and hear: and if a poet, who had occasion to introduce these characters in a comedy, were to give the same uniform colour of language to them all, the style of that comedy, however elegant, would be unnatural. Our language is also affected by the very thoughts we utter. When these are lofty or groveling, there is a correspondent elevation or meanness in the language. The style of a great man is generally simple, but seldom fails to partake of the dignity and energy of his sentiments. In Greece and Rome, the corruption of literature was a consequence of the corruption of manners; and the manly simplicity of the old writers disappeared, as the

nation became effeminate and servile. Horace and Longinus * scruple not to ascribe the decline of eloquence, in their days, to a littleness of mind, the effect of avarice and luxury. The words of Longinus are remarkable. "The truly "eloquent (says he) must possess an exalted and "noble mind; for it is not possible for those who "have all their lives been employed in servile "pursuits, to produce any thing worthy of im-"mortal renown or general admiration." In fact, our words not only are the signs, but may be considered as the pictures of our thoughts. The same glow or faintness of colouring, the same consistency or incoherence, the same proportions of great and little, the same degrees of elevation, the same light and shade, that distinguish the one, will be found to characterise the other: and from such a character as Achilles or Othello we as naturally expect a bold, nervous, and animated phraseology, as a manly voice and commanding gesture. It is hardly necessary to add, that style, in order to be natural, must be adapted to the *sex* and to the *nation* of the speaker. These circumstances give a peculiarity to human thought, and must therefore diversify the modes of human language. I

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 322—332. Longinus, sect. 9. 44.

will not say, as some have done, that a lady is always distinguishable by her style and hand-writing, as well as by her voice and features; but I believe it might be truly said, that female conversation, even when learned or philosophical, has, for the most part, an ease and a delicacy, which the greatest masters of language would find it difficult to imitate. The style that Shakspeare has given to Juliet's nurse, Mrs. Quickly, Desdemona, or Katharine, would not suit any male; nor the phraseology of Dogberry or Petruchio, Pistol or Falstaff, any female character. National peculiarities are also to be attended to by those who study natural language in its full extent. We should expect a copious and flowery style from an Asiatick monarch, and a concise and figurative expression from an American chief. A French marquis, and a country gentleman of England, would not use the same phrases on the same subject, even though they were speaking the same language with equal fluency. And a *valet-de-chambre* newly imported from Paris, or a Scotch footman who had been born and bred in Edinburgh, appearing in an English comedy, would be censured as an unnatural character, if the poet were to make him speak pure English.

May we not infer, from what has been said,

that "language is then according to nature, "when it is suitable to the supposed condition "of the speaker?" meaning by the word *condition*, not only the outward circumstances of *fortune*, *rank*, *employment*, *sex*, *age*, and *nation*, but also the internal temperature of the *understanding* and *passions*, as well as the peculiar nature of the *thoughts* that may happen to occupy the mind. Horace seems to have had this in view, when he said, that "if what is spoken on the "stage shall be unsuitable to the *fortunes* of the "speaker, both the learned and unlearned part "of the audience will be sensible of the impro- "priety: for that it is of great importance to "the poet to consider, whether the person "speaking be a slave or a hero; a man of mature "age, or warm with the passions of youth; a "lady of rank, or a bustling nurse; a luxurious "Assyrian, or a cruel native of Colchis; a mer- "cantile traveller, or a stationary husbandman; "an acute Argive, or a dull Beotian."*

But Horace's remark, it may be said, refers more immediately to the style of the drama; whereas we would extend it to poetry, and even to composition, in general. And it may be thought, that in those writings wherein the im-

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 112.

itation of human life is less perfect, as in the epick poem, or wherein the style is uniformly elevated and pure, as in history and tragedy, this rule of language is not attended to. In what respect, for example, can the style of Livy or Homer be said to be suitable to the condition of the speaker? Have we not, in each author, a great variety of speeches, ascribed to men of different nations, ranks, and characters; who are all, notwithstanding, made to utter a language, that is not only grammatical, but elegant and harmonious? Yet no reader is offended: and no critick ever said, that the style of Homer or Livy is unnatural.

The objection is plausible. But a right examination of it will be found not to weaken, but to confirm and illustrate the present doctrine. I say, then, that language is natural, when it is suited to the supposed condition and circumstances of the speaker. Now, in history, the speaker is no other than the historian himself; who claims the privilege of telling his tale in his own way; and of expressing the thoughts of other men, where he has occasion to record them, in his own language. All this we must allow to be natural, if we suppose him to be serious. For every man, who speaks without affectation, has a style and a manner peculiar to

himself. A person of learning and eloquence, recapitulating on any solemn occasion the speech of a clown, would not be thought in earnest if he did not express himself with his wonted propriety. It would be difficult, perhaps he would find it impossible, to imitate the hesitation, barbarisms, and broad accent, of the poor man; and if he were to do so, he would affront his audience, and, instead of being thought a natural speaker, or capable of conducting important business, would prove himself a mere buffoon. Now an historian is a person who assumes a character of great dignity, and addresses himself to a most respectable audience. He undertakes to communicate information, not to his equals only or inferiours, but to the greatest, and most learned men upon earth. He wishes them to listen to him, and to listen with pleasure, to believe his testimony, and treasure up his sayings as lessons of wisdom, to direct them in the conduct of life, and in the government of kingdoms. In so awful a presence, and with views so elevated, what style is it natural for him to assume? A style uniformly serious and elegant, clear, orderly, and emphatical, set off with modest ornaments to render it pleasing, yet plain and simple, and such as becomes a man whose chief concern it is to know and de-

liver the truth. The moralist and the preacher are in similar circumstances, and will naturally adopt a similar style: only a more sublime and more pathetick energy, and language still plainer than that of the historian, though not less pure, will with reason be expected from those, who pronounce the dictates of divine wisdom, and profess to instruct the meanest as well as the greatest of mankind, in matters of everlasting importance.

When a man for the publick amusement, assumes any character, it is not necessary, nor possible, for him to impose upon us so far as to make us believe him to be the very person he represents: but we have a right to expect that his behaviour shall not belie his pretensions in any thing material. With all his powers of incantation, Garrick himself will never be able to charm us into a belief, that he is really Macbeth: all that can be done he does; he speaks and acts just as if he were that person; and this is all that the publick requires of him. Were he to fall short, or rather (for we need not suppose what will never happen) were any other tragedian to fall short of our expectations, and plead, by way of excuse, that truly he was neither a king nor a traitor, neither an ambitious nor a valiant man, and therefore ought not to be blamed for

not acting as becomes one; we should more easily pardon the fault, than the apology. Now it is very true, that an epick poet is no more inspired than any other writer, and perhaps was never seriously believed to be so. But as he lays claim to inspiration; and before the whole world professes to display the most interesting and most marvellous events, to be particularly informed in regard to the thoughts as well as actions of men, and to know the affairs of invisible beings and the economy of unseen worlds; we have a right to expect from him a language as much elevated above that of history and philosophy, as his assumed character and pretensions are higher than those of the historian and philosopher. From such a man, supposed to be invested with such a character, we have indeed a right to require every possible perfection of human thought and language. And therefore, if he were to introduce mean persons talking in their own dialect, it would be as unnatural, as if a great orator, on the most solemn occasion, were to lisp and prattle like a child; or a hero to address his victorious army in the jargon of a gypsy or pickpocket.

In the epopee, the muse, or rather the poet, is supposed to speak from beginning to end; the incidental orations ascribed to Thersites or

Nestor, to Ulysses or Polypheme, to Ascanius or Eneas, to Satan or Raphael, not being delivered, as in tragedy, by the several speakers in their own persons, but rehearsed by the poet in the way of narrative. These orations, therefore, must not only be adapted to the characters of those to whom they are ascribed, and to the occasion upon which they are spoken, but must also partake of the supposed dignity of the poet's character. And if so, they must be elevated to the general pitch of the composition; even though they be said to have been uttered by persons from whom, in common life, elegance of style would not have been expected. And a certain degree of the same elevation, must adhere to every description in epick poetry, though the thing described should be comparatively unimportant: which is no more than we naturally look for, when an eloquent man, in a solemn assembly, gives a detail of ordinary events, or recapitulates, in his own style and manner, the sentiments of an illiterate peasant. So that in the epick poem, (and in all serious poetry, narrative or didactick, wherein the poet is the speaker,) language, in order to be natural, must be suited to the assumed or supposed character of the poet, as well as to the occasion and subject. Polyphemus, in a farce or comedy, might speak

clownishly; because he there appears in person, and rusticity is his character: but Homer and Virgil, rehearsing a speech of Polyphemus, would indeed deliver thoughts suitable to his character and condition, but would express them in their own elegant and harmonious language. And hence we see, how absurdly those criticks argue, who blame Virgil for making Eneas *too poetical* (as they are pleased to phrase it) in the account he gives Dido of his adventures. They might with equal reason affirm, that every person in the Iliad and Odyssey, as well as Eneid, speaks too poetically. The mistake arises from confounding epick with dramatick composition, and supposing that the heroes both of the one and of the other speak in their own persons. Whereas, in the first the poet is the only speaker, and in the last he never speaks at all: nay, the first is nothing more, from beginning to end, but a narration, or speech, delivered by a person assuming, and pretending to support, the character of an inspired poet. In the style, therefore, of the epopee, the poetick character must every where predominate, as well as the heroick; because a speech, in order to appear natural, must be suited to the supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the things and persons spoken of.

The puns that Milton ascribes to his devils, on a certain occasion,* are generally and justly condemned. It has, however, been urged, as an apology for them, that they are uttered by evil beings, who may be supposed to have lost, when they fell, all taste for elegance, as well as for virtue: and that the poet, on this one occasion, might have intended to make them both detestable as devils, and despicable as buffoons. But this plea cannot be admitted. For the fiends of Milton, notwithstanding their extreme wickedness, retain an elevation of mind, without which they could not have appeared in an epick poem, and which is inconsistent with the futility of a buffoon or witling. Granting, then, (what is not likely) that the poet, in this one instance, meant to render them contemptible for their low wit, he must yet be blamed for assigning them a part so repugnant to their general character. Or, even if he could be vindicated on this score, he is liable to censure for having put so paltry a part of his narration in the mouth of the holy angel Raphael. Or, if even for this we were to pardon him, still he is inexcusable, for having forgotten the assumed dignity of his own character so far, as to retail those wretched quibbles;

* Paradise Lost, book 6. vers. 609—627.

which, whether we suppose them to be uttered by an angel, a devil, or an epick poet, are grossly unnatural, because totally unsuitable to the condition and character of the speaker. A mind possessed with great ideas does not naturally attend to such as are trifling;* and, while actuated by admiration, and other important emotions, will not be apt to turn its view to those things that provoke contempt or laughter. Such we suppose the mind of every sublime writer to be; and such in fact it must be, as long at least as he employs himself in sublime composition.

* Who that, from Alpine heights, his labouring eye
Shoots round the wide horizon, to survey
The Nile or Ganges rolling his bright wave
Through mountains, plains, through empires black with shade,
And continents of sand, will turn his gaze
To mark the windings of a scanty rill,
That murmurs at his feet?

Pleasures of Imagination, book 1.

"The meditations," says a very ingenious writer, (speaking of the view from Mount Etna), "are ever "elevated in proportion to the grandeur and sublimity "of the objects that surround us; and here, where you "have all nature to rouse your imagination, what man "can remain inactive?" See the whole passage; which, from its sublimity, one would be tempted to think had been composed on the spot. *Brydon's Travels, letter* 10.

Mean language, therefore, or ludicrous sentiments, are unnatural in an epick poem, for this reason, among others, that they do not naturally occur while one is composing it. And hence Milton's humorous description of the *limbo of vanity*,* however just as an allegory, however poignant as a satire, ought not to have obtained a place in Paradise Lost. Such a thing might suit the volatile genius of Ariosto and his followers: but is quite unworthy of the sober and well principled disciple of Homer and Virgil.

In dramatick poetry, the persons act and speak in their own character, and the author never appears at all. An elevated style, may, however, be natural in tragedy, on account of the high rank of the persons, and of the important affairs in which they are engaged. Even comedy, who takes her characters from the middle and lower ranks of mankind, may occasionally lift up her voice, as Horace says,† when she means to give utterance to any important emotion, or happens to introduce a personage of more than ordinary dignity. But what if persons of low condition should make their appearance in tragedy? And as the great must have attendants, how can this be guarded against? And if such persons ap-

* Paradise Lost, book 3. vers. 444.

† Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 92.

pear, will not their language be unnatural, if raised to a level with that of their superiours? Or, would it not give a motley cast to the poem, if it were to fall below that level? No doubt, an uniform colour of language, though not essential to tragi-comedy, or to the historick drama, is indispensable in a regular tragedy. But persons of mean rank, if the tragick poet find it necessary to bring them in, may easily be supposed to have had advantages of education to qualify them for bearing a part in the dialogue, or for any other office in which he may think proper to employ them. Besides, language admits of many degrees of elevation; and a particular turn of fancy, or temperature of the passions, will sometimes give wonderful sublimity to the style even of a peasant or of a savage. So that the style of tragedy, notwithstanding its elevation, may be as various as the characters and passions of men, and may yet in each variety be natural. Moreover, the subject, and consequently the emotions, of tragedy, are always important; and important emotions prevailing in the mind of a peasant will exalt and invigorate his language. When the old shepherd in *Douglas* exclaims, "Blest be the day that made me a poor man; "my poverty has saved my master's house;" the thought and the words, though sufficiently tra-

gical, have no greater elevation, than we should expect from any person of his character and circumstances. Simplicity of style, for which none are disqualified by the meanness of their condition, often enforces a sublime or pathetick sentiment with the happiest effect. Let it be observed further, that poetical language is an imitation of real language improved to a state of perfection; and therefore, that the style of tragedy, though raised above that of common life, will never offend, so long as its elevations are at all consistent with probability. In fact, when the passions are well expressed, and the characters well drawn, a tragick poet needs not fear, that he shall be found fault with for the elegance of his language: though no doubt a great master will always know how to proportion the degree of elegance to the character of the speaker.

The dignity of a tragick hero may be so great as to require an elevation of language equal to the pitch of epick poetry itself. This might be exemplified from many of the speeches of Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Cato, and of Samson in the Agonistes. But, in general, the epick style is to be distinguished from the tragick, by a more uniform elevation, and more elaborate harmony: because a poet, assuming the character of calm inspiration, and rather relating the feelings of

others, than expressing his own, would speak with more composure, steadiness, and art, than could reasonably be expected from those who deliver their thoughts according to the immediate impulse of passion.

The language of comedy is that of common life improved in point of correctness, but not much elevated; both because the speakers are of the middle and lower ranks of mankind, and also because the affairs they are engaged in give little scope to those emotions that exalt the mind, and rouse the imagination. As to the style of farce, which is frequently blended with comedy; it is purposely degraded below that of common life; or rather, it is the ridiculous language of common life made more ridiculous. I have already remarked, that farce is to poetry what caricatura is to painting; as in the last we look for no beauty of attitude or feature, so neither in the first do we expect elegance of diction. Absurdity of thought produces absurdity of words and behaviour: the true farcical character is more extravagantly and more uniformly absurd, than the droll of real life; and his language, in order to be natural, must be exaggerated accordingly. Yet as nothing is esteemed in the fine arts, but what displays the ingenuity of the artist, I should imagine, that, even in a

farce, one would not receive much pleasure from mere incongruity of words or actions; because that may be so easily invented. Studied absurdity cannot be entertaining, unless it be in some degree uncommon.*

We may therefore repeat, and lay it down as a maxim, "That language is natural, when it is "suited to the speaker's condition, character, "and circumstances." And as, for the most part, the images and sentiments of serious poetry are copied from the images and sentiments, not of real, but of improved, nature;† so the language of serious poetry must (as hinted already) be a transcript, not of the real language of nature, which is often dissonant and rude, but of natural language improved as far as may be consistent with probability, and with the supposed character of the speaker. If this be not the case, if the language of poetry be such only as we hear in conversation, or read in history, it will, instead of delight, bring disappointment: because it will fall short of what we expect from an art which is recommended rather by its pleasurable qualities, than by its intrinsick utility; and to which, in order to render it pleasing, we grant

* Essay on Laughter, chap. 3.

† See above, part 1. chap. 3, 4, 5.

higher privileges, than to any other kind of literary composition, or any other mode of human language.

The next inquiry must therefore be, "How "is the language of nature to be improved?" or rather, "What are those improvements that "peculiarly belong to the language of poetry?"

SECTION II.

Natural Language is improved in Poetry by the use of Poetical Words.

One mode of improvement peculiar to poetical diction results from the use of those words, and phrases, which, because they rarely occur in prose, and frequently in verse, are by the grammarian and lexicographer termed *poetical*. In these some languages abound more than others: but no language I am acquainted with is altogether without them; and perhaps no language can be so, in which any number of good poems have been written. For poetry is better remembered than prose, especially by poetical authors; who will always be apt to imitate the phraseology of those they have been accustomed to read and admire: and thus, in the works of

poets, down through successive generations, certain phrases may have been conveyed, which, though originally perhaps in common use, are now confined to poetical composition. Prose writers are not so apt to imitate one another, at least in words and phrases; both because they do not so well remember one another's phraseology, and also because their language is less artificial, and must not, if they would make it easy and flowing, (without which it cannot be elegant), depart essentially from the style of correct conversation. Poets too, on account of the greater difficulty of their numbers, have, both in the choice and in the arrangement of words, a better claim to indulgence, and stand more in need of a discretionary power.

The language of Homer differs materially from what was written and spoken in Greece in the days of Socrates. It differs in the mode of inflection, it differs in the syntax, it differs even in the words; so that one might read Homer with ease, who could not read Xenophon; or Xenophon, without being able to read Homer. Yet I cannot believe that Homer, or the first Greek poet who wrote in his style, would make choice of a dialect quite different from what was intelligible in his own time; for poets have in all ages written with a view to be read, and to be read

with pleasure; which they could not be, if their diction were hard to be understood. It is more reasonable to suppose, that the language of Homer is according to some ancient dialect, which, though not perhaps in familiar use among the Greeks at the time he wrote, was however intelligible. From the Homerick to the Socratick age, a period had elapsed of no less than four hundred years; during which the style both of discourse and of writing must have undergone great alterations. Yet the Iliad continued the standard of heroick poetry, and was considered as the very perfection of poetical language; notwithstanding that some words in it were become so antiquated, or so ambiguous, that Aristotle himself seems to have been somewhat doubtful in regard to their meaning.* And if Chaucer's merit as a poet had been as great as Homer's, and the English tongue under Edward the third, as perfect as the Greek was in the second century after the Trojan war, the style of Chaucer would probably have been our model for poetical diction at this day; even as Petrarcha, his contemporary, is still imitated by the best poets of Italy.

I have somewhere read, that the rudeness of

* Aristot. Poet. cap. 25.

the style of Ennius was imputed by the old criticks to his having copied too closely the dialect of common life. But this, I presume, must be a mistake. For, if we compare the fragments of that author with the comedies of Plautus, who flourished in the same age, and whose language was certainly copied from that of common life, we shall be struck with an air of antiquity in the former, that is not in the latter. Ennius, no doubt, like most other sublime poets, affected something of the antique in his expression: and many of his words and phrases, not adopted by any prose writer now extant, are to be found in Lucretius and Virgil, and were by them transmitted to succeeding poets. These form part of the Roman poetical dialect; which appears from the writings of Virgil, where we have it in perfection, to have been very copious. The style of this charming poet is indeed so different from prose, and is altogether so peculiar, that it is perhaps impossible to analyse it on the common principles of Latin grammar. And yet no author can be more perspicuous or more expressive; notwithstanding the frequency of Grecism in his syntax, and his love of old words, which he, in the judgment of Quintilian, knew better than any other man how to improve into decoration.*

* Quintil. Instit. viii. 3. § 3

The poetical dialect of modern Italy is so different from the prosaick, that I have known persons who read the historians, and even spoke with tolerable fluency the language of that country, but could not easily construe a page of Petrarcha or Tasso. Yet it is not probable, that Petrarcha, whose works are a standard of the Italian poetical diction,* made any material innovations in his native tongue. I rather believe, that he wrote it nearly as it was spoken in his time, that is, in the fourteenth century; omitting only harsh combinations, and taking that liberty which Homer probably, and Virgil certainly, took before him, of reviving such old, but not obsolete expressions, as seemed peculiarly significant and melodious; and polishing his style to that degree of elegance which human speech, without becoming unnatural, may admit of, and which the genius of poetry, as an art subservient to pleasure, may be thought to require.

The French poetry in general is distinguished from prose rather by the rhyme and the measure, than by old or uncommon phraseology. Yet the French, on certain subjects, imitate the style of their old poets, of Marot in particular, and may therefore be said to have something of

* Vicende della literatura del Denin, cap. 4

a poetical dialect, though far less extensive than the Italian, or even than the English. And it may, I think, be presumed, that in future ages they will have more of this dialect than they have at present. This I would infer from the very uncommon merit of some of their late poets, particularly Boileau and La Fontaine, who, in their respective departments, will continue to be imitated, when the present modes of French prose are greatly changed: an event that, for all the pains they take to preserve their language, must inevitably happen, and whereof there are not wanting some presages already.

The English poetical dialect is not characterized by any peculiarities of inflection, nor by any great latitude in the use of foreign idioms. More copious it is, however, than one would at first imagine. I know of no author who has considered it in the way of detail.* What follows is but a very short specimen.

* Since writing the above, I have had the pleasure to read the following judicious remarks on this subject. "The language of the age is never the language "of poetry, except among the French, whose verse, "where the sentiment or image does not support it, "differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the con-"trary, has a language peculiar to itself; to which al-"most every one that has written has added something.

1. A few Greek and Latin idioms are common in English poetry, which are seldom or never to be met with in prose. QUENCHED OF HOPE. Shakspeare.—SHORN OF HIS BEAMS. Milton. —*Created thing* NOR VALUED HE NOR SHUNN'D. Milton.—*'Tis thus we riot, while* WHO SOW IT STARVE. Pope.—INTO WHAT PIT THOU SEE'ST FROM WHAT HEIGHT FALLEN. Milton.—*He de-*

" by enriching it with foreign idioms, and derivatives; " nay, sometimes words of their own composition or " invention. Shakspeare and Milton have been great " creators this way; and no one more licentious than " Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow expressions " from the former. Let me give you some instances from " Dryden, whom every body reckons a great master " of our poetical tongue. Full of *museful mopings*—unlike " the *trim* of love—a pleasant *beverage*—a *roundelay* of " love—stood silent in his *mood*—with knots and *knares* " deformed—his *ireful mood*—in proud *array*—his *boon* " was granted—and *disarray* and shameful rout—*way-* " *ward* but wise—*furbished* for the field—*dodder'd* oaks " —*disherited*—*smouldering* flames—*retchless* of laws— " *crones* old and ugly—the *beldam* at his side—the *gran-* " *dam hag*—*villanize* his father's fame. But they are infi- " nite: and our language not being a settled thing, (like " the French) has an undoubted right to words of an " hundred years old, provided antiquity have not ren- " dered them unintelligible."

Mr. Gray's Letters, sect. 3. *letter* 4.

ceived the mother of mankind, WHAT TIME HIS PRIDE HAD CAST HIM *out of heaven*. Milton. Some of these, with others to be found in Milton, seem to have been adopted for the sake of brevity, which in the poetical tongue is indispensable. For the same reason perhaps, the articles *a* and *the* are sometimes omitted by our poets, though less frequently in serious than burlesque composition.* In English, the adjective generally goes before the substantive, the nominative before the verb, and the active verb before (what we call) the accusative. Exceptions, however, to this rule, are not uncommon even in prose. But in poetry they are more frequent. *Their homely joys, and* DESTINY OBSCURE. *Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight; and all*

* In the Greek poetry, the omission of the article is more frequent than the use of it. The very learned and ingenious author of a Treatise *On the Origin and Progress of Language*, supposes, that in the time of Homer, who established their poetical language, the article was little used by the Greeks: and this supposition appears highly probable, when we consider, that in the Latin, which was derived from the Pelasgick tongue, (a very ancient dialect of Greek), there is no article. Yet, though the article had been in use in Homer's age, I imagine that he, and every other Greek poet who wrote hexameters, would have often found it *necessary* to leave it out.

the air a solemn stillness holds. In general, that versification may be less difficult, and the cadence more uniformly pleasing; and sometimes, too, in order to give energy to expression, or vivacity to an image, the English poet is permitted to take much greater liberties, than the prose writer, in arranging his words, and modulating his lines and periods. Examples may be seen in every page of Paradise Lost.

2. Some of our poetical words take an additional syllable, that they may suit the verse the better; as, *dispart*, *distain*, *disport*, *affright*, *enchain*, for part, stain, sport, fright, chain. Others seem to be nothing else than common words made shorter, for the convenience of the versifier. Such are *auxiliar*, *sublunar*, *trump*, *vale*, *part*, *clime*, *submiss*, *frolick*, *plain*, *drear*, *dread*, *helm*, *morn*, *eve*, *mead*, and *even*, *gan*, *illume* and *illumine*, *ope*, *hoar*, *hide*, *swage*, *scape;* for auxiliary, sublunary, trumpet, valley, depart, climate, submissive, frolicksome, complain, dreary, dreadful, helmet, morning, meadow, evening, began or began to, illuminate, open, hoary, abide, assuage, escape. Of some of these the short form is the more ancient. In Scotland, *even*, *morn*, *bide*, *swage*, are still in vulgar use; but *morn*, except when contradistinguished to even, is synonymous, not with *morning*, (as in the English poetical dialect,) but with *morrow*. The Latin poets, in a way

somewhat similar, and perhaps for a similar reason, shortened *fundamentum*, *tutamentum*, *munimentum*, &c. into fundamen, tutamen, munimen.*

3. Of the following words which are now almost peculiar to poetry, the greater part are ancient, and were once no doubt in common use in England, as many of them still are in Scotland. *Afield*, *amain*, *annoy* (a noun), *anon*, *aye* (ever), *behest*, *blithe*, *brand* (sword), *bridle*, *carol*, *dame* (lady), *featly*, *fell* (an adjective), *gaude*, *gore*, *host* (army), *lambkin*, *late* (of late), *lay* (poem), *lea*, *glade*, *gleam*, *hurl*, *lore*, *meed*, *orisons*, *plod* (to travel laboriously), *ringlet*, *rue* (a verb), *ruth*, *ruthless*, *sojourn* (a noun), *smite*, *speed* (an active verb), *save* (except), *spray* (twig), *steed*, *strain* (song), *strand*, *swain*, *thrall*, *thrill*, *trail* (a verb), *troll*, *wail*, *welter*, *warble*, *wayward*, *woo*, *the while* (in the mean time), *you*, *of yore*.

4. These that follow are also poetical; but, so far as I know, were never in common use. *Aptal*, *arrowy*, *attune*, *battailous*, *breezy*, *car* (chariot), *clarion*, *cates*, *courser*, *darkling*, *flicker*, *floweret*,

* Quod poetæ alligati ad certam pedum necessitatem, non semper propriis uti possint, sed depulsi a recta via necessario ad eloquendi quædam diverticula confugiant; nec mutare quædam modo verba, sed *extendere*, *corripere*. convertere, dividere, cojantur. *Quintilian.*

emblaze, *gairish*, *circlet*, *impearl*, *nightly*, *noiseless*, *pinion* (wing), *shadowy*, *slumberous*, *streamy*, *troublous*, *wilder* (a verb), *shrill* (a verb), *shook* (shaken), *madding*, *viewless*. I suspect too, that the following, derived from the Greek and Latin, are peculiar to poetry. *Clang*, *clangour*, *choral*, *bland*, *boreal*, *dire*, *ensanguined*, *ire*, *ireful*, *lave* (to wash), *nymph* (lady, girl), *orient*, *panoply*, *philomel*, *infuriate*, *jocund*, *radiant*, *rapt*, *redolent*, *refulgent*, *verdant*, *vernal*, *zephyr*, *zone* (girdle), *sylvan*, *suffuse*.

5. In most languages, the rapidity of pronunciation abbreviates some of the commonest words, or even joins two, or perhaps more, of them, into one; and some of these abbreviated forms find admission into writing. The English language was quite disfigured by them in the end of the last century; but Swift, by his satire and example, brought them into disrepute: and, though some of them be retained in conversation, as *don't*, *shan't*, *can't*, they are now avoided in solemn style; and by elegant writers in general, except where the colloquial dialect is imitated, as in comedy. *'Tis* and *'twas*, since the time of Shaftesbury, seem to have been daily losing credit, at least in prose; but still have a place in poetry; perhaps because they contribute to conciseness. *'Twas on a lofty vase's side*. Gray. *'Tis*

true, 'tis certain, man though dead retains part of himself. Pope.—In verse too, *over* may be shortened into *o'er*, (which is the Scotch, and probably was the old English, pronunciation) *never* into *ne'er;* and from *the* and *to*, when they go before a word beginning with a vowel, the final letter is sometimes cut off. *O'er hills, o'er dales, o'er crags, o'er rocks they go.* Pope.—*Where'er she turns, the graces homage pay. And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave. Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unrol.* Gray.—*T' alarm th' eternal midnight of the grave.* These abreviations are now peculiar to the poetical tongue, but not necessary to it. They sometimes promote brevity, and render versification less difficult.

6. Those words which are commonly called *compound epithets*, as *rosy-finger'd, rosy-bosom'd, many-twinkling, many-sounding, moss-grown, bright-eyed, straw-built, spirit-stirring, incense-breathing, heaven-taught, love-whispering, lute-resounding*, are also to be considered as part of our poetical dialect. It is true we have compounded adjectives in familiar use, as *high-seasoned, well-natured, ill-bred*, and innumerable others. But I speak of those that are less common, that seldom occur except in poetry, and of which in prose the use would appear affected. And that they sometimes promote brevity and

vivacity of expression, cannot be denied. But, as they give, when too frequent, a stiff and finical air to a performance; as they are not always explicit in the sense, nor agreeable in the sound; as they are apt to produce a confusion, or too great a multiplicity of images; as they tend to disfigure the language, and furnish a pretext for endless innovation; I would have them used sparingly; and those only used, which the practice of popular authors has rendered familiar to the ear, and which are in themselves peculiarly emphatical and harmonious. For I cannot think, with Dacier and Sanadon, that this well known verse in Horace's Art of Poetry,

> Dixeris egregie, notum si callida verbum
> Reddiderit junctura novum ——

gives any warrant, even to a Latin poet, for the formation of these compound words; which, if I mistake not, were more fashionable in the days of Ennius, than of Horace or Virgil.*

* The criticks are divided about the meaning of this passage. Horace is speaking of *new words;* which he allows to be sometimes necessary: but which, he says, ought to be *sparingly* and *cautiously* introduced; In verbis etiam *tenuis cautusque* serendis; and then subjoins the words quoted in the text, Dixeris egregie, &c.

1. Some think, that this *callida junctura* refers to the

7. In the transformation of nouns into verbs and participles, our poetical dialect admits of greater latitude than prose. Hymn, pillow, curtain, story, pillar, picture, peal, surge, cavern,

formation of *compound epithets*, as velivolus, saxifragus, solivagus, &c. and that the import of the precept is this: "Rather than by bringing in a word altogether new, even "when a new word is necessary, you should express "yourself by two known words artfully joined together "into one, so as to assume a new appearance, and to ad- "mit a new though analogical signification." This might no doubt be done with propriety in some cases. But I cannot think, that Horace is here speaking of compound words. For, first, this sort of words were much more suitable to the genius of the Greek than of the Latin tongue; as Quintilian somewhere insinuates, and every body knows who is at all acquainted with these languages. Secondly, we find in fact, that these words are less frequent in Horace and Virgil, than in the older poets; whence we may infer, that they became less fashionable as the Latin tongue advanced nearer to perfection. Thirdly, Virgil is known to have introduced three or four new words from the Greek, *Lychni*, *Spelæa*, *Thyas*, &c. but it does not appear, that either Virgil or Horace ever fabricated one of these compound words; and it is not probable, that Horace would recommend a practice, which neither himself nor Virgil had ever warranted by example. Fourthly, our author, in his illustrations upon the precept in question, affirms, that new words will more easily obtain currency if taken from the Greek tongue; and Virgil, if we may judge of

honey, career, cincture, bosom, sphere, are common nouns; but, *to hymn*, *to pillow*, *curtained*, *pillared*, *pictured*, *pealing*, *surging*, *cavern'd*, *honied*, *careering*, *cinctured*, *bosomed*, *sphered*, would ap-

his opinions by his practice, appears to have been of the same mind. And there was good reason for it. The Greek and Latin are kindred languages; and as the former was much studied at Rome, there was no risk of introducing any obscurity into the Roman language by the introduction of a Greek word. Lastly, it may be doubted, whether *junctura*, though it often denotes the composition of words in a sentence or clause (Quintil. ix. 4.), and sometimes arrangement or composition in general (Hor. Ar. Poet. verse 242.) is ever used to express the union of syllables in a word, or of simple words in a compound epithet.

2. Other interpreters suppose, that this *callida junctura* refers to the arrangement of words in the sentence, and that the precept amounts to this: "When a new expression is necessary, you will acquit yourself well, if "by means of an artful arrangement you can to a known "word give a new signification." But one would think, that the observance of this precept must tend to the utter confusion of language. To give new significations to words in present use, must increase the ambiguity of language, which in every tongue is greater than it ought to be, and which would seem to be more detrimental to eloquence and even to literature, than the introduction of many new words of definite meaning. Those who favour this interpretation give *comæ silvarum* for *folia*, as a phrase to exemplify the precept. But

pear affected in prose, though in verse they are warranted by the very best authority.

Some late poets, particularly the imitators of Spenser, have introduced a great variety of un-

the foilage of a tree is not a new idea, nor could there be any need of a new word or new phrase to express it: though a poet, no doubt, on account of his verse, or on some other account, might choose to express it by *a figure*, rather than by its *proper* name. *Comæ sylvarum* for *folia*, is neither less nor more than a metaphor, or, if you please, a catachresis; but Horace is speaking, not of figurative language, but of new words. Both these interpretations suppose, that the words of our poet are to be construed according to this order: Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit *notum verbum novum*.

3. The best of all our poet's interpreters, the learned Dr. Hurd, construes the passage in the same manner, and explains it thus: "Instead of framing new words, I "recommend to you any kind of artful management, by "which you may be able to give a new air and cast to "old ones." And this explication he illustrates most ingeniously by a variety of examples, that throw great light on the subject of poetical diction. See his notes on the *Ars Poetica*.

I should ill consult my credit, if I were to oppose my judgment to that of this able critick and excellent author. Yet I would beg leave to say, that to me the poet seems, through this whole passage, from vers. 46. to vers. 72. to be speaking of the *formation of new words;* a practice whereof he allows the danger, but proves the necessity. And I find I cannot divest myself of an old prejudice

common words, as certes, eftsoons, ne, whilom, transmew, moil, fone, losel, albe, hight, dight, pight, thews, couthful, assot, muchel, wend, arrear, &c. These were once poetical words, no doubt; but they are now obsolete, and to many readers unintelligible. No man of the present age, however conversant in this dialect, would naturally express himself in it on any interesting emergence; or, supposing this natural to the antiquarian, it would never appear so to the common hearer or reader. A mixture of these words, therefore, must ruin the pathos of mod-

in favour of another interpretation, which is more obvious and simple, and which I considered as the best, long before I knew it was authorized by that judicious annotator Joannes Bond, and by Dryden in his notes upon the Eneid, as well as by the Abbe Batteux in his commentary on Horace's *Art of Poetry*. "New words "(says the poet) are to be cautiously and sparingly in-"troduced; but, when necessary, an author will do well "to give them such a position in the sentence, as that "the reader shall be at no loss to discover their mean-"ing." For I would construe the passage thus, Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit *novum verbum notum*. But why, it may be said, did not Horace, if this was really his meaning, put *novum* in the first line, and *notum* in the second? The answer is easy. His verse would not admit that order: for the first syllable of *novum* is short, and the first syllable of *notum* long.

ern language; and as they are not familiar to our ear, and plainly appear to be sought after and affected, will generally give a stiffness to modern versification. Yet in subjects approaching to the ludicrous they may have a good effect; as in the *Schoolmistress* of Shenstone, Parnel's Fairy Tale, Thomson's Castle of Indolence, and Pope's lines in the Dunciad upon Wormius. But this effect will be most pleasing to those who have least occasion to recur to the glossary.

But why, it may be asked, should these old words be more pathetick and pleasing in Spenser, than in his imitators? I answer, because in him they seem, or we believe them to be, natural; in them we are sure they are affected. In him there is an ease and uniformity of expression, that shows he wrote a language not materially different from what was written by all the serious poets of his time; whereas the mixed dialect of these imitators is plainly artificial, and such as would make any man ridiculous, if he were now to adopt it in conversation. A long beard may give dignity to the portrait or statue of a hero, whom we know to have been two hundred years in his grave: but the chin of a modern European commander bristling with that antique appendage, would appear awkward and ridiculous. But did not Spenser himself make use of

words that are known to have been obsolete, or merely provincial, in his time? Yes; and these words in Spenser have the same bad effect, that words now obsolete have in his imitators; they are to most readers unintelligible, and to those who understand them appear ludicrous or affected: some of his eclogues, and even some passages in the Fairy Queen, are liable to this censure. But what if Spenser had fixed the poetical language of England, as Homer did that of Greece? Would any of his old words in that case have appeared awkward in a modern poem? Perhaps they would not: but let it be observed, that, in that case, they would have been adopted by Milton, and Dryden, and Pope, and by all our serious poets since the age of Elizabeth; and would therefore have been perfectly intelligible to every reader of English verse; and, from our having been so long accustomed to meet with them in the most elegant compositions, would have acquired a dignity equal, or perhaps superiour, to that which now belongs to the poetical language of Pope and Milton.

I grant, it is not always easy to fix the boundary between poetical and obsolete expressions. To many readers, *lore*, *meed*, *behest*, *blithe*, *gaude*, *spray*, *thrall*, may already appear antiquated; and to some the style of Spenser, or even of Chau-

cer, may be as intelligible as that of Dryden. This however we may venture to affirm, that a word, which the majority of readers cannot understand without a glossary, may with reason be considered as obsolete; and ought not to be used in modern composition, unless revived, and recommended to the publick ear, by some very eminent writer. There are but few words in Milton, as *nathless*, *tine*, *frore*, *bosky*, &c.; there are but one or two in Dryden, as *falsify:** and in Pope, there are none at all, which every reader of our poetry may not be supposed to understand: whereas in Shakspeare there are many, and in Spenser many more, for which one who knows English very well may be obliged to consult the dictionary. The practice of Milton, Dryden, or Pope, may therefore, in almost all cases, be admitted as good authority for the use of a poetical word. And in them, all the words above enumerated, as poetical, and in present use, may actually be found. And of such poets as may choose to observe this rule, it will not be said, either that they reject the judgment of Quin-

* Dryden in one place (Eneid ix. vers. 1095) uses *falsified* to denote *pierced through and through*. He acknowledges, that this use of the word is an innovation; and has nothing to plead for it but his own authority, and that *falsare* in Italian sometimes means the same thing.

tilian, who recommends the newest of the old words, and the oldest of the new, or that they are unattentive to Pope's precept,

> Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
> Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.*

We must not suppose, that these poetical words never occur at all, except in poetry. Even from conversation they are not excluded; and the ancient criticks allow, that they may be admitted into prose; where they occasionally confer dignity upon a sublime subject, or, for reasons elsewhere hinted at,† heighten the ludicrous qualities of a mean one. But it is in poetry only, where the frequent use of them does not savour of affectation.

Nor must we suppose them essential to this art. Many passages there are of exquisite poetry, wherein not a single phrase occurs, that might not be used in prose. In fact the influence of these words in adorning English verse is not very extensive. Some influence however they have. They serve to render the poetical style, first, more melodious; and, secondly, more solemn.

First, They render the poetical style more

* Essay on Criticism, vers. 335.

† Essay on Laughter, chap. 2. sect. 4.

melodious, and more easily reducible into measure. Words of unwieldy size, or difficult pronunciation, are never used by correct poets, where they can be avoided; unless in their sound they have something imitative of the sense. Homer's poetical inflections contribute wonderfully to the sweetness of his numbers: and if the reader is pleased to look back to the specimen I gave of the English poetical dialect, he will find that the words are in general well sounding, and such as may coalesce with other words, without producing harsh combinations. Quintilian observes, that poets, for the sake of their verse, are indulged in many liberties, not granted to the orator, of lengthening, shortening, and dividing their words:* and if the Greek and Roman poets claimed this indulgence from necessity, and obtained it, the English, those of them especially who write in rhyme, may claim it with better reason; as the words of their language are less musical, and far less susceptible of variety in arrangement and syntax.

Secondly, Such poetical words as are known to be ancient have something venerable in their appearance, and impart a solemnity to all around them. This remark is from Quintilian; who

* Instit. Orat. lib. 10. cap. 1. § 4.

adds, that they give to a composition that cast and colour of antiquity, which in painting is so highly valued, but which art can never effectually imitate.* Poetical words that are either not ancient, or not known to be such, have however, a pleasing effect from association. We are accustomed to meet with them in sublime and elegant writing; and hence they come to acquire sublimity and elegance: even as the words we hear on familiar occasions come to be accounted familiar; and as those that take their rise among pickpockets, gamblers, and gypsies, are thought too indelicate to be used by any person of taste or good manners. When one hears the following lines, which abound in poetical words,

> The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
> The swallow twittering from the strawbuilt shed,
> The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
> No more shall rouze them from their lowly bed:

one is as sensible of the dignity of the language, as one would be of the vileness or vulgarity of that man's speech, who should prove his acquaintance with Bridewell, by interlarding his discourse with such terms as *milldoll*, *queer cull*, or *nubbing cheat*;† or who, in imitation of

* Lib. 8. cap. 3. § 3.

† See the Scoundrel's Dictionary.

fops and gamblers, should, on the common occasions of life, talk of being *beat hollow* or *saving his distance*.* What gives dignity to persons gives dignity to language. A man of this character is one who has borne important employments, been connected with honourable associates, and never degraded himself by levity, or immorality of conduct. Dignified phrases are those which have been used to express elevated sentiments, have always made their appearance in elegant composition, and have never been profaned by giving permanency or utterance to the passions of the vile, the giddy, or the worthless. And as by an active old age, the dignity of such men is confirmed and heightened; so the dignity of such words, if they be not suffered to fall into disuse, seldom fails to improve by length of time.

* Language of Newmarket.

SECTION III.

Natural Language is improved in Poetry, by means of Tropes and Figures.

So much for the nature and use of those words that are *poetical*, and yet not figurative. But from *figurative expression* there arises a more copious and important source of poetick eloquence. Some sorts of poetry are distinguished by the beauty, boldness, and frequency of the figures, as well as by the measure, or by any of the contrivances above mentioned. And in prose we often meet with such figures and words, as we expect only in poetry: in which case the language is called *poetical:* and in verse we sometimes find a diction so tame, and so void of ornament, that we brand it with the appellation of *prosaick*.

As my design in this discourse is, not to deliver a system of rhetorick, but to explain the peculiar effects of poetry upon the mind, by tracing out the characters that distinguish this from other literary arts; it would be improper to enter here, with any degree of minuteness, into the philosophy of tropes and figures: these being ornamental, not to poetry only, but to human speech in general. All that the present oc-

casion requires will be performed, when it is shown, in what respects tropical and figurative language is more necessary to poetry than to any other sort of composition.

If it appear, that, by means of figures, language may be made more *pleasing*, and more *natural*, than it would be without them; it will follow that to poetick language, whose end is to *please* by imitating *nature*, figures must be not only ornamental, but necessary. I shall therefore, first, make a few remarks on the importance and utility of figurative language; secondly, show, that figures are more necessary to poetry in general, than to any other mode of writing; and, thirdly, assign a reason why they are more necessary in some kinds of poetry than in others.

I. I purpose to make a few remarks on the importance and utility of figurative expression, in making language more pleasing and more natural.

1. The first remark is, that tropes and figures are often necessary to supply the unavoidable defects of language. When *proper* words are wanting, or not recollected, or when we do not choose to be always repeating them, we must have recourse to tropes and figures. When philosophers began to explain the operations of

the mind, they found, that most of the words in common use, being framed to answer the more obvious exigencies of life, were in their proper signification applicable to matter only and its qualities. What was to be done in this case? Would they think of making a new language to express the qualities of mind? No: that would have been difficult, or impracticable; and granting it both practicable and easy, they must have foreseen, that nobody would read or listen to what was thus spoken or written in a new, and consequently, in an unknown tongue. They therefore took the language as they found it; and, wherever, they thought there was a similarity or analogy between the qualities of mind and the qualities of matter, scrupled not to use the names of the material qualities tropically, by applying them to the mental qualities. Hence came the phrases, *solidity* of judgment, *warmth* of imagination, *enlargement* of understanding, and many others: which, though figurative, express the meaning just as well as *proper* words would have done. In fact, numerous as the words in every language are, they must always fall short of the unbounded variety of human thoughts and perceptions. Tastes and smells are almost as numerous as the species of bodies. Sounds admit of perceptible varieties

that surpass all computation, and the seven primary colours may be diversified without end. If each variety of external perception were to have a name, language would be insurmountably difficult; nay, if men were to appropriate a class of names to each particular sense, they would multiply words exceedingly, without adding any thing to the clearness of speech. Those words, therefore, that in their proper significations denote the objects of one sense, they often apply tropically to the objects of another; and say, sweet taste, sweet smell, sweet sound; sharp point, sharp taste, sharp sound; harmony of sounds, harmony of colours, harmony of parts; soft silk, soft colour, soft sound, soft temper; and so in a thousand instances; and yet these words, in their tropical signification, are not less intelligible than in their proper one; for sharp taste and sharp sound, are as expressive as sharp sword; and harmony of tones is not better understood by the musician, than harmony of parts by the architect, and harmony of colours by the painter.

Savages, illiterate persons, and children, have comparatively but few words in proportion to the things they may have occasion to speak of; and must therefore recur to tropes and figures more frequently, than persons of copious elo-

cution. A seaman, or mechanick, even when he talks of that which does not belong to his art, borrows his language from that which does; and this makes his diction figurative to a degree that is sometimes entertaining enough. "Death, "(says a seaman in one of Smollet's novels) has "not yet *boarded* my comrade; but they have "been *yard arm and yard arm* these *three glasses.* "His *starboard* eye is open, but fast *jamm'd* "in his head; and the *haulyards* of his under "jaw have given way." These phrases are exaggerated; but we allow them to be natural, because we know that illiterate people are apt to make use of tropes and figures taken from their own trade, even when they speak of things that are very remote and incongruous. In those poems, therefore, that imitate the conversation of illiterate persons, as in comedy, farce, and pastoral, such figures judiciously applied may render the imitation more pleasing, because more exact and natural.

Words that are untuneable and harsh the poet is often obliged to avoid, when perhaps he has no other way to express their meaning than by tropes and figures; and sometimes the measure of his verse may oblige him to reject a proper word that is not harsh, merely on account of its being too long, or too short, or in any other way

unsuitable to the rhythm, or to the rhyme. And hence another use of figurative language, that it contributes to poetical harmony. Thus, *to press the plain* is frequently used to signify *to be slain in battle; liquid plain* is put for *ocean, blue serene* for *sky*, and *sylvan reign* for *country life.*

2. Tropes and figures are favourable to delicacy. When the proper name of a thing is in any respect unpleasant, a well chosen trope will convey the idea in such a way as to give no offence. This is agreeable, and even necessary, in polite conversation, and cannot be dispensed with in elegant writing of any kind. Many words, from their being often applied to vulgar use, acquire a meanness that disqualifies them for a place in serious poetry; while perhaps, under the influence of a different system of manners, the corresponding words in another language may be elegant, or at least not vulgar. When one reads Homer in the Greek, one takes no offence at his calling Eumeus by a name which, literally rendered, signifies *swineherd*; first, because the Greek word is well sounding in itself; secondly, because we have never heard it pronounced in conversation, nor consequently debased by vulgar use; and, thirdly, because we know, that the office denoted by it was, in the age of Eumeus, both important and honour-

able. But Pope would have been blamed, if a name so indelicate as *swineherd* had in his translation been applied to so eminent a personage; and therefore he judiciously makes use of the trope *synecdoche*, and calls him *swain*;* a word both elegant and poetical, and not likely to lead the reader into any mistake about the person spoken of, as his employment had been described in a preceding passage. The same Eumeus is said, in the simple, but melodious language of the original, to have been making his own shoes when Ulysses came to his door; a work which in those days the greatest heroes would often find necessary. This too the translator softens by a tropical expression:

> Here sat Eumeus, and his cares applied
> To form strong *buskins* of well season'd hide.

A hundred other examples might be quoted from this translation; but these will explain my meaning.

There are other occasions, on which the delicacy of figurative language is still more needful: as in Virgil's account of the effects of animal love, and of the plague among the beasts, in the third Georgick; where Dryden's style, by

* Pope's Homer's Odyssey, book 14. vers. 41.

being less figurative than the original, is in one place exceedingly filthy, and in another obscene.

Hobbes could construe a Greek author: but his skill in words must have been all derived from the dictionary: for he seems not to have known, that any one articulate sound could be more agreeable, or any one phrase more dignified, than any other. In his Iliad and Odyssey, even when he hits the author's sense, (which is not always the case), he proves, by his choice of words, that of harmony, elegance, or energy of style, he had no manner of conception. And hence that work, though called a translation of Homer, does not even deserve the name of *poem;* because it is in every respect *unpleasing*, being nothing more than a fictitious narrative delivered in mean prose, with the additional meanness of harsh rhyme, and untuneable measure. Trapp understood Virgil well enough as a grammarian, and had a taste for his beauties; yet his translation bears no resemblance to Virgil; which is owing to the same cause, an imprudent choice of words and figures, and a total want of harmony.

I grant, that the delicacy we here contend for may, both in conversation and in writing, be carried too far. To call *killing an innocent*

man in a duel an affair of honour, and *a violation of the rights of wedlock* an affair of gallantry, is a prostitution of figurative language. Nor do I think it any credit to us, that we are said to have upwards of forty figurative phrases to denote excessive drinking. Language of this sort generally implies, that the publick abhorrence of such crimes is not so strong as it ought to be: and I am not certain, whether even our morals might not be improved, if we were to call these and such like crimes by their proper names, murder, adultery, drunkenness, gluttony; names, that not only express our meaning, but also betoken our disapprobation. As to writing, it cannot be denied, that even Pope himself, in the excellent version just now quoted, has sometimes, for the sake of his numbers, or for fear of giving offence by too close an imitation of Homer's simplicity, employed tropes and figures too quaint or too solemn for the occasion. And the finical style is in part characterised by the writer's dislike to literal expressions, and affectedly substituting in their stead unnecessary tropes and figures. With these authors, a man's only child must always be his *only hope*, a country maid becomes a *rural beauty*, or perhaps a *nymph of the groves;* if flattery sing at all, it must be a *syren song;* the shepherd's flute

dwindles into an *oaten reed*, and his crook is exalted into a *sceptre:* the *silver lillies* rise from their *golden beds*, and *languish* to the *complaining* gale. A young woman, though a good christian, cannot make herself agreeable without *sacrificing to the graces;* nor hope to do any execution among the *gentle swains*, till a whole legion of *cupids*, armed with *flames* and *darts*, and other weapons, begin to discharge from her eyes their formidable artillery. For the sake of variety, or of the verse, some of these figures may now and then find a place in a poem; but in prose, unless very sparingly used, they savour of affectation.

3. Tropes and figures promote brevity; and brevity, united with perspicuity, is always agreeable. An example or two will be given in the next paragraph. Sentiments thus delivered, and imagery thus painted, are readily apprehended by the mind, make a strong impression upon the fancy, and remain long in the memory: whereas too many words, even when the meaning is good, never fail to bring disgust and weariness. They argue a debility of mind which hinders the author from seeing his thoughts in one distinct point of view; and they also encourage a suspicion, that there is something faulty or defective in the matter. In the

poetick style, therefore, which is addressed to the fancy and passions, and intended to make a vivid, a pleasing, and a permanent impression, brevity, and consequently tropes and figures, are indispensable. And a language will always be the better suited to poetical purposes, the more it admits of this brevity; a character which is more conspicuous in the Greek and Latin than in any modern tongue, and much less in the French than in the Italian or English.

4. Tropes and figures contribute to strength or energy of language, not only by their conciseness, but also by conveying to the fancy ideas that are easily comprehended, and make a strong impression. We are powerfully affected with what we see, or feel, or hear. When a sentiment comes enforced or illustrated by figures taken from objects of sight, or touch, or hearing, one thinks, as it were, that one sees, or feels, or hears, the thing spoken of; and thus, what in itself would be perhaps obscure, or is merely intellectual, may be made to seize our attention and interest our passions almost as effectually as if it were an object of outward sense. When Virgil calls the Scipios *thunderbolts of war*, he very strongly expresses in one word, and by one image, the rapidity of their victories, the noise their achievements

made in the world, and the ruin and consternation that attended their irresistible career. When Homer calls Ajax *the bulwark of the Greeks*, he paints with equal brevity his vast size and strength, the difficulty of prevailing against him, and the confidence wherewith his countrymen reposed on his valour. When Solomon says of the strange woman, or harlot, that "her feet go *down* to death," he lets us know, not only that her path ends in destruction, but also, that they who accompany her will find it easy to go forward to ruin, and difficult to return to their duty. Satan's enormous magnitude, and refulgent appearance, his perpendicular ascent through a region of darkness, and the inconceivable rapidity of his motion, are all painted out to our fancy by Milton, in one very short similitude,

Sprung upward, like—a pyramid of fire:*

To take in the full meaning of which figure, we must imagine ourselves in chaos, and a vast luminous body rising upward near the place where we are, so swiftly as to appear a continued tract of light; and lessening to the view according to the increase of distance, till it end

* Parad. Lost, book 2. verse 1013.

in a point, and then disappear; and all this must be supposed to strike our eye at one instant. Equal to this in propriety, though not in magnificence, is that allegory of Gray,

> The paths of glory lead but to the grave:

which presents to the imagination a wide plain, where several roads appear, crowded with glittering multitudes, and issuing from different quarters, but drawing nearer and nearer as they advance, till they terminate in the dark and narrow house, where all their glories enter in succession, and disappear for ever. When it is said in scripture, of a good man who died, that he *fell asleep*, what a number of ideas are at once conveyed to our imagination, by this beautiful and expressive figure! As a labourer, at the close of day, goes to sleep, with the satisfaction of having performed his work, and with the agreeable hope of awaking in the morning of a new day, refreshed and cheerful; so a good man, at the end of life, resigns himself calm and contented to the will of his Maker, with the sweet reflection of having endeavoured to do his duty, and with the transporting hope of soon awaking in the regions of light, to life and happiness eternal. The figure also suggests, that

to a good man the transition from life and death is even in the sensation no more painful, than when our faculties melt away into the pleasing insensibility of sleep. Satan flying among the stars is said by Milton to "*sail* between worlds "and worlds;" which has an elegance and force far superiour to the proper word *fly*. For by this allusion to a ship, we are made to form a lively idea of his great size, and to conceive of his motion, that it was equable and majestick. Virgil uses a happy figure to express the size of the great wooden horse, by means of which the Greeks were conveyed into Troy: "Equum "divina Palladis arte *ædificant*." Milton is still bolder when he says,

> Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
> Himself to sing, and *build the lofty rhyme*.*

The phrase, however, though bold, is emphatical, and gives a noble idea of the durability

* In the Latin phrase *condere carmen*, which Milton no doubt had in his view, the verb is of more general signification, than the English verb *to build;* and therefore the figure is bolder in English than Latin. It may even be doubted, whether *condere carmen* be at all figurative; for *Condere* is resolved by R. Stephanus into *simul dare*. *Condere carmen*, *condere poema*, *condere historiam*, occur in Cicero and Pliny; but Milton's phrase is much too daring for English prose.

of poetry, as well as of the art and attention requisite to form a good poem. There are hundreds of tropical expressions in common use, incomparably more energetick than any proper words of equal brevity that could be put in their place. A cheek *burning* with blushes, is a trope which at once describes the colour as it appears to the beholder, and the glowing heat as it is felt by the person blushing. *Chilled* with despondence, *petrified* with astonishment, *thunderstruck* with disagreeable and unexpected intelligence, *melted* with love or pity, *dissolved* in luxury, *hardened* in wickedness, *softening* into remorse, *inflamed* with desire, *tossed* with uncertainty, &c.; every one is sensible of the force of these and the like phrases, and that they must contribute to the energy of composition.

5. Tropes and figures promote strength of expression, and are in poetry peculiarly requisite, because they are often more *natural*, and more *imitative*, than proper words. In fact, this is so much the case, that it would be impossible to imitate the language of passion without them. It is true, that when the mind is agitated, one does not run out into allegories, or long-winded similitudes, or any of the figures that require much attention and many words, or

that tend to withdraw the fancy from the object of the passion. Yet the language of many passions must be figurative, notwithstanding; because they rouse the fancy, and direct it to objects congenial to their own nature, which diversify the language of the speaker with a multitude of allusions. The fancy of a very angry man, for example, presents to his view a train of disagreeable ideas connected with the passion of anger, and tending to encourage it; and if he speak without restraint during the paroxysm of his rage, those ideas will force themselves upon him, and compel him to give them utterance. "Infernal monster! (he will "say) my blood boils at him: he has used me "like a dog; never was man so injured as I "have been by this barbarian. He has no more "sense of propriety than a stone. His counte- "nance is diabolical, and his soul as ugly as his "countenance. His heart is as cold and hard, "and his resolutions dark and bloody," &c. This speech is wholly figurative. It is made up of *metaphors* and *hyperboles*, which, with the *prosopopeia* and *apostrophe*, are the most passionate of all the figures. Lear, driven out of doors by his unnatural daughters, in the midst of darkness, thunder, and tempest, naturally breaks forth (for his indignation is just now

raised to the highest pitch) into the following violent exclamation against the crimes of mankind, in which almost every word is figurative.

> Tremble thou wretch,
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes
> Unwhipt of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
> Thou perjured, and thou simular of virtue,
> Thou art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
> That under covert, and convenient seeming,
> Hast practised on man's life. Close pent up guilts,
> Rive your concealing continents, and cry
> These dreadful summoners grace.

The vehemence of maternal love, and sorrow from the apprehension of losing her child, make the lady Constance utter a language that is strongly figurative, though quite suitable to the condition and character of the speaker. The passage is too long for a quotation, but concludes thus:

> O Lord! my Arthur, my fair son,
> My life, my joy, my food, my all the world,
> My widow comfort, and my sorrow's cure.*

Similar to this, and equally expressive of conjugal love, is that beautiful hyperbole in Homer; where Andromache, to dissuade her

* King John.

husband from going out to the battle, tells him, that she had now no mother, father, or brethren, all her kindred being dead, and her native country desolate; and then tenderly adds,

> But while my Hector yet survives, I see
> My father, mother, brethren, all in thee.*

As the passions that agitate the soul, and rouse the fancy, are apt to vent themselves in tropes and figures, so those that depress the mind adopt for the most part a plain diction without any ornament. For to a dejected mind, wherein the imagination is generally inactive, it is not probable, that any great variety of ideas will present themselves; and when these are few and familiar, the words that express them must be simple. As no author equals Shakspeare in boldness or variety of figures, when he copies the style of those violent passions that stimulate the fancy; so, when he would exhibit the human mind in a dejected state, no uninspired writer excels him in simplicity. The same Lear whose resentment had impaired his understanding, while it broke out in the most boisterous language, when, after some medical applications, he recovers his reason, his

* Iliad, book 6

rage being now exhausted, his pride humbled, and his spirits totally depressed, speaks in a style than which nothing can be imagined more simple or more affecting:

> Pray, do not mock me;
> I am a very foolish, fond old man,
> Fourscore and upward, and, to deal plainly with you,
> I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
> Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
> Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant
> What place this is, and all the skill I have
> Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
> Where I did lodge last night. ———*

Desdemona, ever gentle, artless, and sincere, shocked at the unkindness of her husband, and overcome with melancholy, speaks in a style so beautifully simple, and so perfectly natural, that one knows not what to say in commendation of it:

> My mother had a maid call'd Barbara;
> She was in love, and he she loved proved mad,
> And did forsake her. She had a song of willow;
> An old thing it was, but it express'd her fortune,
> And she died singing it. That song to-night
> Will not go from my mind; I have much to do,

* King Lear, act 4. scene 7.

But to go hang my head all at one side,
And sing it like poor Barbara.*

Sometimes the imagination, even when exerted to the utmost, takes in but few ideas.

* Othello, act 4. scene 3. This charming passage translated into the *finical style*, which, whatever be the subject or speaker, must always be descriptive, enigmatical, and full of figures, would perhaps run thus:

Even now, sad Memory to my thought recals
The nymph Dione, who, with pious care,
My much loved mother, in my vernal years,
Attended: blooming was the maiden's form,
And on her brow Discretion sat, and on
Her rosy cheek a thousand graces play'd.
O luckless was the day, when Cupid's dart,
Shot from a gentle swain's alluring eye,
First thrill'd with pleasing pangs her throbbing breast!
That gentle swain, ah! gentle now no more,
(Horrid to tell!) by sudden phrensy driven,
Ran howling to the wild: blood tinctured fire
Glared from his haggard eyeballs, and on high
The hand of Horrour raised his ragged hair,
And cold sweat bathed his agonizing frame.
What didst thou then, Dione! ill star'd maid!
What couldst thou do! From morn to dewy eve,
From eve till rosy-finger'd morn appear'd,
In a sad song, a song of ancient days,
Warbling her wild woe to the pitying winds,
She sat; the weeping willow was her theme,
And well the theme accorded with her woe;

This happens when the attention is totally engrossed by some very great object; admiration being one of those emotions that rather suspend the exercise of the faculties, than push them into action. And here too the simplest language is the most natural; as when Milton says of the Deity, that he sits "highthroned above all "height." And as this simplicity is more suitable to that one great exertion which occupies the speaker's mind, than a more elaborate imagery or language would have been; so has it also a more powerful effect in fixing and elevating the imagination of the hearer: for, to introduce other thoughts for the sake of illustrating what cannot be illustrated, could answer no other purpose, than to draw off the attention from the

> Till fate suppress'd at length th' unfinish'd lay.
> Thus on Meander's flowery mantled side
> The dying cygnet sings, and singing dies.

I hope my young readers are all wiser; but I believe that there was a time when I should have been tempted to prefer this flashy tinsel to Shakspeare's fine gold. I do not say, that in themselves these lines are all bad, though several of them are; and in some sorts of composition the greater part might perhaps be pardonable; but I say, that, considered in relation to the character and circumstances of Desdemona, they are all unnatural, and therefore not poetical.

principal idea. In these and the like cases, the fancy left to itself will have more satisfaction in pursuing at leisure its own speculations, than in attending to those of others; as they who see for the first time some admirable object, would choose rather to feast upon it in silence, than to have their thoughts interrupted by a long description from another person, informing them of nothing but what they see before them, are already acquainted with, or may easily conceive. On these principles, I cannot but think, that Milton's elaborate account of the creation of light,* excellent as it is in many particulars, is yet far less striking to the mind, than that famous passage of Moses, so justly admired by Longinus for its sublimity, "And God said, let "there be light; and there was light." When I contemplate the idea suggested by these few simple words, I fancy myself encompassed with the darkness of chaos; that I hear the Almighty

* Let there be light, God said; and forthwith light
Etherial, first of things, quintessence pure,
Sprung from the deep, and from her native east
To journey through the aery gloom began,
Sphered in a radiant cloud; for yet the sun
Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle
Sojourn'd the while.

Parad. Lost, vii. 244.

word, and the same instant see light diffused over all the immensity of nature. Here an object, the greatest surely that can be imagined, the whole illuminated universe starts at once into view. And the fancy seems to be assisted not a little by the shortness and simplicity of the phrase, which hint the instantaneousness of the effect, and the facility wherewith the first cause operates in producing a work so unutterably beautiful, and so astonishingly great.

But to return from this digression, which was only intended to show, that though some thoughts and emotions require a figurative, others as naturally adopt a simple, style: I remarked, that the *hyperbole*, *prosopopeia*, and *apostrophe*, are among the most passionate figures. This deserves illustration.

1. A very angry man is apt to think the injury he has just received greater than it really is; and if he proceed immediately to retaliate by word or deed, seldom fails to exceed the due bounds, and to become injurious in his turn. The fond parent looks upon his child as a prodigy of genius and beauty; and the romantick lover will not be persuaded that his mistress has nothing supernatural either in her mind or person. Fear, in like manner, not only magnifies its object when real, but even forms an object out of no-

curate enough to show, that, in forming such words, regard has been had to the imitative qualities of vocal sound. Such, in English, are the words yell, crash, crack, hiss, roar, murmur, and many others.

All the particular laws that regulate this sort of imitation, as far as they are founded in nature, and liable to the cognisance of philosophy, depend on the general law of style above mentioned. Together with the other circumstances of the supposed speaker, the poet takes into consideration the tone of voice suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and thereto adapts the sound of his language, if it can be done consistently with ease and elegance of expression. But when this imitative harmony is too much sought after, or words appear to be chosen

> Ne si Scossa giamai trema la terra,
> Quando i vapori in sen gravida serra.
>
> *Can. 4. st. 4.*

> To call the tribes that roam the Stygian shores,
> The hoarse Tartarean trump in thunder roars;
> Hell through her trembling caverns starts aghast,
> And Night's black void rebellows to the blast:
> Far less the peal that rends th' etherial world,
> When bolts of vengeance from on high are hurl'd;
> Far less the shock that heaves earth's tottering frame,
> When its torn entrails spout th' imprison'd flame.

for sound rather than sense, the verse becomes finical and ridiculous.*

Words by their sound may imitate sound; and quick or slow articulation may imitate quick or slow motion. Hence by a proper choice and arrangement of words, the poet may imitate *sounds* that are sweet with dignity (*a*)—sweet and

* Such is Ronsard's affected imitation of the song of the skylark:

Elle quindée du zephire
Sublime en l'air vire et revire,
Et y declique un joli cris,
Qui rit, guérit, et tire l'ire
Des esprits mieux que je n'écris.

This is as ridiculous as that line of Ennius,

Tum tuba terribili sonitu taratantara dixit:

Or as the following verses of Swift;

The man with the kettledrum enters the gate,
Dub dub a dub dub: the trumpeters follow,
Tantara tantara; while all the boys hollow.

(*a*) No sooner had th' Almighty ceas'd, than all
The multitude of angels, with a shout,
Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
As from blest voices uttering joy; heaven rung
With jubilee, and loud hosannas fill'd
The eternal regions. ——

Par. Lost, book 3.

See

tender (*b*)—loud (*c*)—and harsh (*d*);—and *motions* that are slow in consequence of digni-

See also the night storm of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain, in Virg. Georg. lib. 1. vers. 328—334.

(*b*) Et longum, formose, vale, vale, inquit, Iola.

Virg. Ecl. 3.

Formosam resonare doces Amarillida silvas.

Virg. Ecl. 1.

See also the simile of the nightingale, Geor. lib. 4. vers. 511. And see the wonderful couplet describing the wailings of the owl, Æneid. IV. 462.

(*c*) ——————vibratus ab æthere fulgor
Cum sonitu venit, et ruere omnia visa repente,
Tyrrhenusque tubæ mugire per æthera clangor;
Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens

Æneid 8.

See also the storm in the first book of the Eneid, and in the fifth of the Odyssey; and the stanza already quoted from Tasso.

(*d*) The hoarse rough verse should like the torrent roar.

Pope.

——————On a sudden open fly,
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder ——

Par. Lost, II. 179.

See also Homer's Iliad, lib. 3. vers. 363. and Clarke's annotation.

ty (*e*)—slow in consequence of difficulty (*f*)—swift and noisy (*g*)—swift and smooth (*h*)—uneven and abrupt (*k*)—quick and joyous (*m*). An

(*e*) See an exquisite example in Gray's Progress of Poesy; the conclusion of the third stanza.

(*f*) And when up ten steep slopes you've dragg'd your thighs. *Pope.*

Just brought out this, when scarce his tongue could stir. *Pope.*

——— The hugh leviathan
Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait,
Tempest the ocean. *Par. Lost*, VII. 411.

See the famous description of Sisyphus rolling the stone, Odyss. lib. 11. vers. 592. See Quintil. Inst. Orat. lib. 9. cap. 4. § 4. compared with Paradise Lost, B. 2. vers. 1022.

(*g*) Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum. *Æneid.*

Αὐτὰρ ἐπεῖτα πεδόνδε κυλίνδετο λᾶας ἀναιδης. *Odyss.* 11.

See also Virg. Æneid. lib. 1. vers. 83—87.

(*h*) See wild as the winds o'er the desart he flies. *Pope.*

Ille volat, simul arva fuga, simul æquora verrens. *Virg.*

Ῥηιδίη τ' ἐπεται πέλει, χαλεπὴ περ ἐοῦσα. *Hesiod.*

(*k*) Πολλα δ' αναντα καταντα παραντα τε δοχμια τ' ηλθον. *Hom.*

The lass shriek'd, started up, and shriek'd again. *Anonym.*

(*m*) Let the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound,

To

unexpected pause in the verse may also imitate a sudden failure of strength (*n*), or interruption of motion (*o*), or give vivacity to an image or thought, by fixing our attention longer than usual upon the word that precedes it (*p*). More-

> To many a youth and many a maid,
> Dancing in the chequer'd shade.
>
> *Milton's Allegro.*

See also Gray's Progress of Poesy, Stanza 3.

(*n*) Ac velut in somnis oculos ubi languida pressit
Nocte quies, nequicquam avidos extendere cursus
Velle videmur:—et in mediis conatibus ægri
Succidimus. —— *Æneid*, 12.

See also Virg. Georg. lib. 3. vers. 515, 516.

(*o*) For this, besure to night thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stiches that shall pen thy breath up. Urchins
Shall exercise upon thee ———
Prospero to Calyban in *the Tempest.*

See Pope's Iliad, XIII. 199.

(*p*) ———— How often from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
Celestial voices, to the midnight air,
Sole,—or responsive to each other's note,
Singing their great Creator? ———
Par. Lost, b. 4.

And over them triumphant Death his dart
Shook, —— but delay'd to strike. *Id.*

See also Hom. Odyss. lib. 9. vers. 290.

over, when we describe great bulk, it is natural for us to articulate slowly even in common discourse; and therefore a line of poetry that requires a slow pronunciation, or seems longer then it should be, may be used with good effect in describing vastness of size (*q*). Sweet and smooth numbers are most proper, when the poet paints agreeable objects, or gentle energy (*r*); and harsher sounds when he speaks of what

(*q*) Thus stretch'd out, huge in length, the arch fiend lay,
Par. Lost.

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum. *Virg. Æneid*, 3.

Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacertosque
Exuit, atque ingens media consistit arena.
Æneid, 5. *vers.* 422.

(*r*) Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori,
Hic nemus, hic ipso tecum consumerer ævo.
Virg. Ecl. 10.

The dumb shall sing, the lame his crutch forego,
And leap, exulting, like the bounding roe.
Pope's Messiah.

See Milton's description of the evening, Par. Lost, book 4. vers. 598—609.

Ye gentle gales, beneath my body blow,
And softly lay me on the waves below.
Pope's Sappho.

is ugly, violent, or disagreeable (*s*). This too is according to the nature of common language; for we generally employ harsher tones of voice to express what we dislike, and more melodious notes to describe the objects of love, complacency, or admiration. Harsh numbers however should not be frequent in poetry. For in this art, as in musick, concord and melody ought always to predominate. And we find in fact, that good poets can occasionally express themselves somewhat harshly, when the subject requires it, and yet preserve the sweetness and majesty of poetical diction. Further, the voice of complaint, pity, love, and all the gentler affections is mild and musical, and should therefore be imitated in musical numbers; while despair, defiance, revenge, and turbulent emotions in general, assume an abrupt and sonorous cadence. Dignity

(*s*) Stridenti stipula miserum disperdere carmen.
Virg. Ecl. 3.

Immo ego Sardois videar tibi amarior herbis,
Horridior rusco, projecta vilius alga.
Virg. Ecl. 7.

Neu patriæ validas in viscera vertite vires.
Virg. Æneid. 6.

See also Milton's description of the Lazarhouse in Paradise Lost, book 11. vers. 477—492.

of description (*t*), solemn vows (*u*), and all sentiments that proceed from a mind elevated with great ideas (*v*), require a correspondent pomp of language and versification. Lastly: an irregular or uncommon movement in the verse may sometimes be of use, to make the reader conceive an image in a particular manner. Virgil describing horses running over rocky heights at full speed, begins the line with two dactyls, to imitate rapidity, and concludes it with eight long syllables (*w*); which is a very unusual measure but seems well adapted to the thing expressed, namely, to the descent of the animal

(*t*) See Virg. Georg. I. 328. and Homer, Virgil, and Milton, *passim*. See also Dryden's Alexander's Feast, and Gray's Odes.

(*u*) See Virg. Æneid. IV. 24.

(*v*) Examples are frequent in the great authors. See Othello's exclamation:

——— O now for ever
Farewel the tranquil mind! &c. *Act* 3. *scene* 3.

(*w*) Saxa per, et scopulos, et depressas convalles, *Geor.* III. 276. Milton seems to have imitated this movement, when he says,

——— Eternal wrath
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit

See above, Part 1. chap. 6. sect. 1.

from the hills to the low ground. At any rate this extraordinary change of the rhythm may be allowed to bear some resemblance to the animal's change of motion, as it would be felt by a rider, and as we may suppose it is felt by the animal itself.

Other forms of imitative harmony, and many other examples, besides those referred to at the bottom of the pages, will readily occur to all who are conversant in the writings of the best versifiers, particularly Homer, Virgil, Milton, Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, Shakspeare, Pope, and Gray.

I must not conclude without remarking, in justice to the Greek and Latin poets, that, from our ignorance of the ancient pronunciation, we are but incompetently skilled in their numbers; and that there may be, and probably are, in Homer and Virgil, many imitative harmonies whereof we are not sensible at all. The *quantity* of Greek and Latin syllables we know well enough; but it is a notorious fact, that in cases innumerable our pronunciation of them is contrary to what we know to be right. Thus, in reading the following line of Horace,

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetæ,

every body pronounces the first syllable of *volunt* long, and the last short; and yet every body knows, that the first is short, and the last long. All regular hexameters begin with a long syllable; yet how often do the best readers introduce them with a short one!

When we read this line, by which Virgil meant both to describe and to imitate slow motion,

Et sola in sicca seccum spatiatur arena,*

we make only five or six of the syllables long; and yet in this line there are no fewer than ten long syllables. Must it not then to a Roman ear have appeared more imitative, than it does to ours?

In each of those admirable hexameters, so descriptive of great size,

Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacertosque.
Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum,

there are eleven long syllables, according to the ancient pronunciation, and only six or seven according to the modern. If, then, there be any natural suitableness in the slow rhythm of these lines, (and Virgil certainly thought there was) must not that have been more observable anciently than it is now?

* Georg. i. 389.

In the English tongue, the foot spondeus, consisting of two long syllables, is not frequent, there being generally one short syllable, or more, for each long syllable. And as our accented or emphatick syllables are all long, and as we give emphasis to the Greek and Latin syllables in the same way almost as to our own, we seldom preserve in our pronunciation the rhythm of the ancient poetry, and are (I think) most apt to lose it in those verses that abound in the spondeus. The dactyl, of one long and two short syllables, is very common in English; and it sometimes happens, though not often, that in pronouncing an hexameter of dactyls we preserve the true rhythm tolerably well. Of such an hexameter I take the rhythm to be the same with the following:

Multitudes rush'd all at once on the plain with a thundering uproar.

And according to this rhythm, nearly, we do in fact pronounce the last line of Homer's celebrated description of Sisyphus.* But this line of Virgil, whose measure and motion are exactly the same, the moderns pronounce differently, at least in the first three feet:

* For the example see next page.

* Αυταρ ε-	πειτα πι-	δονδε κυ-	λινδετο	λακς αν-	αιδης.
Multitudes	rush'd all at	once on the	plain with a	thundering	uproar.
Quadrupe-	dante pu-	trem soni-	tu quatit	ungula	campum.
Suspici-	unt ite-	r'atqu'ite-	rum fragor	intonat	ingens.

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.

Of this other line of Virgil, describing loud sound,

Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens:

the rhythm is still the same, after making the necessary *elisions;* and if the reader pronounce it so, his ear will perhaps inform him, that it is more imitative than he at first imagined.

In the beginning of the Eneid, Eolus, at Juno's desire, sends out his winds to destroy the Trojan fleet. Neptune rebukes them for invading his dominions without his leave; and is just going to denounce a threatening, or inflict a punishment, when he recollects that it was proper to calm his waters before he did any thing else:

Quos ego—sed motos præstat componere fluctus.

The interrupted threat is a dactyl; the remainder of the line goes off in spondees. By this transition from a quick to a slow rhythm, is it not probable, that the poet intended to imitate the change of Neptune's purpose? But this is lost in our pronunciation, though in the ancient I believe it must have been observable. One instance more and I quit the subject.

When Dido, that fatal morning on which she

put a period to her life, saw that Eneas and his Trojans were actually gone, she at first broke forth into frantick denunciations of revenge and ruin; but soon checks herself, as if exhausted by her passion, when she reflects that her ravings were all in vain. "Unhappy Dido! (says "she) thy evil destiny is now come upon thee."* This change of her mind from tempest to a momentary calm (for she immediately relapses into vengeance and distraction) is finely imitated in the poet's numbers. The words I have translated from a line of spondees, whose slow and soft motion is a striking contrast to the abrupt and sonorous rapidity of the preceding and following verses. This beauty, too, is in a great measure lost in our pronunciation; for we give only five or six long syllables to a line which really contains eleven. Are these remarks too refined? Those readers will hardly think so, who have studied Virgil's versification, which is artful and apposite to a degree that was never equalled or attempted by any other poet.

* Infelix Dido! nunc te fata impia tangunt. *Æneid.* iv. 596. If we read *facta impia*, with the Medicean Manuscript, the rhythm is still the same, and the sense not materially different: "Unhappy Dido! now are the consequences of thy broken vows come upon thee."

In the course of these observations on the *sound* of poetical language, I am not conscious of having affirmed any thing which does not admit of proof. Some of the proofs, however, I was obliged to leave out; as they would have led me into long disquisitions, relating rather to the peculiarities of Latin and English verse, than to the general characters of the poetick art. These proofs may possibly find a place hereafter in *a treatise of versification and English prosody*, which I began some years ago, but have not yet finished.

AN ESSAY

ON

LAUGHTER

AND

LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.

Written in the year 1764.

Ego vero omni de re facetius puto posse ab homine non inurbano, quam de ipsis facetiis, disputari.

CICERO.

AN ESSAY

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CHAPTER I.

Introduction. The Subject proposed. Opinions of Philosophers. I. *Aristotle.* II. *Hobbes.* III. *Hutcheson.* IV. *Akenside.*

OF man, it is observed by Homer, that he is the most wretched, and, by Addison and others, that he is the merriest animal in the whole creation: and both opinions are plausible, and both perhaps may be true. If, from the acuteness and delicacy of his perceptive powers, from his remembrance of the past, and his anticipation of what is to come, from his restless and creative fancy, and from the various sensibilities of his moral nature, man be ex-

posed to many evils, both imaginary and real, from which the brutes are exempted, he does also from the same sources derive innumerable delights, that are far beyond the reach of every other animal. That our preeminence in pleasure should thus in some degree, be counterbalanced by our preeminence in pain, was necessary to exercise our virtue, and wean our hearts from sublunary enjoyment; and that beings thus beset with a multitude of sorrows should be supplied from so many quarters with the means of comfort, is suitable to that benign economy which characterises every operation of nature.

When a brute has gratified those few appetites that minister to the support of the species, and of the individual, he may be said to have attained the summit of happiness, above which a thousand years of prosperity could not raise him a single step. But for man, her favourite child, nature has made a more liberal provision. He, if he have only guarded against the necessities of life, and indulged the animal part of his constitution, has experienced but little of that felicity whereof he is capable. To say nothing at present of his moral and religious gratifications, is he not furnished with faculties that fit him for receiving pleasure from

almost every part of the visible universe? Even to those persons, whose powers of observation are confined within a narrow circle, the exercise of the necessary arts may open inexhaustible sources of amusement, to alleviate the cares of a solitary and laborious life. Men of more enlarged understanding, and more cultivated taste, are still more plentifully supplied with the means of innocent delight. For such, either from acquired habit, or from innate propensity, is the soul of man, that there is hardly any thing in art or nature from which we may not derive gratification. What is great overpowers with pleasing astonishment; what is little may charm by its nicety of proportion, or beauty of colour; what is diversified, pleases by supplying a series of novelties; what is uniform, by leading us to reflect on the skill displayed in the arrangement of its parts; order and connection gratify our sense of propriety; and certain forms of *irregularity* and *unsuitableness* raise within us that agreeable emotion whereof LAUGHTER is the outward sign.

RISIBILITY, considered as one of the characters that distinguish man from the inferiour animals, and as an instrument of harmless, and even of profitable recreation, to every age, condition, and capacity of human creatures, must

be allowed to be not unworthy of the philosopher's notice. Whatever is peculiar to rational nature, must be an object of some importance to a rational being; and Milton has observed, that

> Smiles from reason flow,
> To brutes denied: ———

Whatever may be employed as a means of discountenancing vice, folly, or falsehood, is an object of importance to a moral being, and Horace has remarked,

> Ridiculum acri
> Fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res.*

Let this apology suffice at present for my choice of a subject. Even this apology might have been spared: for nothing is below the attention of philosophy, which the Author of nature has been pleased to establish.

In tracing out the cause of laughter, I mean rather to illustrate than to censure the opinions of those who have already written on the same subject. The investigation has been several times attempted; nor is the cause altogether

* ——— Ridicule shall frequently prevail,
And cut the knot when graver reasons fail.
FRANCIS.

unknown. Yet notwithstanding former discoveries, the following essay may perhaps be found to contain something new; to throw light on certain points of criticism that have not been much attended to; and even to have some merit (if I execute my purpose) as a familiar example of philosophical induction carried on with a strict regard to fact, and without any previous bias in favour of any theory.

To provoke laughter, is not essential either to wit or to humour. For though that unexpected discovery of resemblance between ideas supposed dissimilar, which is called *wit*, and that comick exhibition of singular characters, sentiments, and imagery, which is denominated *humour*, do frequently raise laughter, they do not raise it always. Addison's poem to sir Godfrey Kneller, in which the British kings are likened to heathen gods, is exquisitely witty, and yet not laughable. Pope's Essay on Man abounds in serious wit; and examples of serious humour are not uncommon in Fielding's history of Parson Adams, and in Addison's account of sir Roger de Coverly. Wit, when the subject is grave, and the allusions sublime, raises admiration instead of laughter: and if the comick singularities of a good man appear in circumstances of real distress, the imitation of those

singularities, in the epick or dramatick comedy, will form a species of humour, which if it should force a smile, will draw forth a tear at the same time. An inquiry, therefore, into the distinguishing characters of wit and humour, has no necessary connection with the present subject. I did, however, once intend to have touched upon them in the conclusion of this discourse: but Dr. Campbell's masterly disquisition concerning that matter, in the first part of his *Philosophy of Rhetorick*, makes it improper for me to attempt it. I was favoured with a perusal of that work in manuscript, when I had finished the three first chapters of this essay for the press; and was agreeably surprised to find my notions, in regard to the cause or object of laughter, so fully warranted by those of my very learned and ingenious friend. And it may not perhaps be improper to inform the publick, that neither did he know of my having undertaken this argument, nor I of his having discussed that subject, till we came mutually to exchange our papers, for the purpose of knowing one another's sentiments in regard to what we had written.

Some authors have treated of ridicule, without marking the distinction between *ridiculous* and *ludicrous* ideas. But I presume the natu-

ral order of proceeding in this inquiry, is to begin with ascertaining the nature of what is *purely ludicrous*. Things *ludicrous* and things *ridiculous* have this in common, that both excite pure laughter, the latter excite laughter mixed with disapprobation or contempt.* My design is, to analyse and explain that quality in things or ideas, which makes them provoke *pure laughter*, and entitles them to the name of *ludicrous* or *laughable*.

When certain objects, qualities, or ideas, occur to our senses, memory, or imagination, we smile or laugh at them, and expect that other men should do the same. To smile on certain occasions, is not less *natural*, than to weep at the sight of distress or cry out when we feel pain.

There are different kinds of laughter. As a boy passing by night through a church yard, sings or whistles in order to conceal his fear even from himself, so there are men, who, by forcing a smile, endeavour sometimes to hide from others, and from themselves too perhaps, their malevolence or envy. Such laughter is unnatural. The sound of it offends the ear; the

* Ridiculus proprie dicitur qui in rebus turpibus ridetur. Festus.

features distorted by it seem horrible to the eye. A mixture of hypocrisy, malice, and cruel joy, thus displayed on the countenance, is one of the most hateful sights in nature, and transforms the "human face divine" into the visage of a fiend. Similar to this is the smile of a wicked person pleasing himself with the hope of accomplishing his evil purposes. Milton gives a striking picture of it, in that well known passage:

> He ceased; for both seem'd highly pleased, and Death,
> Grin'd horrible a ghastly smile, to hear
> His famine should be fill'd, and bless'd his maw
> Destin'd to that good hour. ——

But enough of this. Laughter that makes man a fiend or monster, I have no inclination to analyze. My inquiries are confined to "that "species of laughter, which is at once natural "and innocent."

Of this there are two sorts. The laughter occasioned by tickling or gladness is different from that which arises on reading the Tale of a Tub. The former may be called *animal* laughter: the latter (if it were lawful to adopt a new word, which has become very common of late) I should term *sentimental*. Smiles admit of similar divisions. Not to mention the scornful, the envious, the malevolent smile, I would only re-

mark, that of the innocent and agreeable smile there are two sorts. The one proceeds from the risible emotion, and has a tendency to break out into laughter. The other is the effect of good humour, complacency, and tender affection. This last sort of smile renders a countenance amiable in the highest degree. Homer ascribes it to Venus, in an epithet,* which Dryden and Pope, after Waller, improperly translated *laughter-loving;* an idea that accords better with the character of a romp or hoyden, than with the goddess of love and beauty.

Animal laughter admits of various degrees; from the gentle impulse excited in a child by moderate joy, to that terrifying and even mortal convulsion, which has been known to accompany an unexpected change of fortune. This passion may, as well as joy and sorrow, be communicated by sympathy;† and I know not whether the entertainment we receive from the playful tricks of kittens and other young animals, may not in part be resolved into something like a fellow feeling of their vivacity. Animal and sentimental laughter are frequently blended; but it is easy to distinguish them.

* Φιλομμειδης. † Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 101

The former is often excessive; the latter never, unless heightened by the other. The latter is always pleasing, both in itself and in its cause; the former may be painful in both. But their principal difference is this: the one always proceeds from a sentiment or emotion, excited in the mind, in consequence of certain objects or ideas being presented to it, of which emotion we may be conscious even when we suppress laughter; the other arises, not from any sentiment, or perception of ludicrous ideas, but from some bodily feeling, or sudden impulse, on what is called the animal spirits, proceeding, or seeming to proceed, from the operation of causes purely material. The present inquiry regards that species that is here distinguished by the name of *sentimental laughter*.

The pleasing emotion,* arising from the view of ludicrous ideas, is known to every one by experience, but, being a simple feeling, admits not of definition. It is to be distinguished from the laughter that generally attends it, as sorrow is to be distinguished from tears; for it is often felt in a high degree by those who

* This emotion I sometimes call the *risible emotion*, and sometimes the *ludicrous sentiment;* terms that may be sufficiently intelligible, though perhaps they are not according to strict analogy.

are remarkable for gravity of countenance. Swift, seldom laughed, notwithstanding his uncommon talents in wit and humour, and the extraordinary delight he seems to have had in surveying the ridiculous side of things. Why this agreeable emotion should be accompanied with laughter as its outward sign, or sorrow express itself by tears, or fear by trembling and paleness, I cannot ultimately explain, otherwise than by saying, that such is the appointment of the Author of nature. All I mean by this inquiry is, to determine, *what is peculiar to those things which provoke laughter; or, rather, which raise in the mind that pleasing sentiment or emotion whereof laughter is the external sign.*

I. Philosophers have differed in their opinions concerning this matter. Aristotle, in the fifth chapter of his Poeticks, observes of comedy, that "it imitates those vices or meannesses only "which partake of the ridiculous: now the ridicu-"lous (says he) consists in some fault or turpitude "not attended with great pain, and not destruc-"tive." It is clear, that Aristotle here means to characterise, not laughable qualities in general, (as some have thought) but the objects of comick ridicule only; and in this view the definition is just, however, it may have been overlooked or despised by comick writers. Crimes

and misfortunes are often in modern plays, and were sometimes in the ancient, held up as objects of publick merriment; but if poets had that reverence for nature which they ought to have, they would not shock the common sense of mankind by so absurd a representation. I wish our writers of comedy and romance would in this respect imitate the delicacy of their ancestors, the honest and brave savages of old Germany, of whom the historian says, "Nemo "vitia ridet; nec corrumpere et corrumpi secu-"lum vocatur."* The definition from Aristotle does not, however, suit the general nature of ludicrous ideas; for it will appear by and by, that men laugh at that in which there is neither fault nor turpitude of any kind.

II. The theory of Mr. Hobbes would hardly have deserved notice, if Addison had not spoken of it with approbation in the forty-seventh paper of the *Spectator*. "The passion of laughter (says "Mr. Hobbes) is nothing else, but sudden glory "arising from some sudden conception of some "eminency in ourselves by comparison with "the infirmity of others, or with our own for-"merly. For men (continues he) laugh at the "follies of themselves past, when they come

* Tacitus, de moribus Germanorum, cap. 19

" suddenly to remembrance, except they bring " with them any present dishonour." Addison justly observes, after quoting these words, that " according to this account, when we hear a " man laugh excessively, instead of saying that he " is very merry, we ought to tell him that he is " very proud." It is strange, that the elegant author should be aware of this consequence, and yet admit the theory; for so good a judge of human nature could not be ignorant, that laughter is not considered as a sign of pride; persons of singular gravity being often suspected of that vice, but great laughers seldom or never. When we see a man attentive to the innocent humours of a merry company, and yet maintain a fixed solemnity of countenance, is it natural for us to think, that he is the humblest, and the only humble person, in the circle?

Another writer in the Spectator, No. 249. remarks, in confirmation of this theory, that the *vainest* part of mankind are most addicted to the passion of laughter. Now, how can this be, if the *proudest* part of mankind are also most addicted to it, unless we suppose vanity and pride to be the same thing? But they are certainly different passions. The proud man despises other men, and derives his chief pleasure from the contemplation of his own importance:

the vain man stands in need of the applause of others, and cannot be happy without it. Pride is apt to be reserved and sullen; vanity is often affable, and officiously obliging. The proud man is so confident of his merit, and thinks it so obvious to all the world, that he will scarce give himself the trouble to inform you of it: the vain man, to raise your admiration, scruples not to tell you, not only the whole truth, but even a great deal more. In the same person these two passions may, no doubt, be united: but some men are too proud to be vain, and some vain men are too conscious of their own weaknes to be proud. Be all this, however, as it will, we have not as yet made any discovery of the cause of laughter; in regard to which, I apprehend that the vain are not more intemperate than other people; and I am sure that the proud are much more so.

The instances brought by Addison, in favour of this theory of Mr. Hobbes; of "great men "formerly keeping in their retinue a person to "laugh at, who was by profession a fool; of "Dutchmen being diverted with the sign of the "gaper; of the mob entertaining themselves "with jackpuddings, whose humour lies in "committing blunders; and of the amusement "that some people find in making as many

"Aprilfools as possible:"* these instances, I say, may prove the truth of the distich, quoted by our author from Dennis, who translates it from Boileau,

> Thus one fool lolls his tongue out at another,
> And shakes his empty noddle at his brother.

But I cannot see how they should prove, that laughter is owing to pride, or to a sense of our superiority over the ludicrous object. Great men are as merry now when they do not keep professed jesters, as they were formerly when they did. The gaper may be a common sign at Amsterdam, as the Saracen's head is in England, without being the standing jest of the country, or indeed any jest at all. The jackpudding is considered, even by the mob, as more rogue than fool; and they who attend the stage of the itinerant physician, do for the most part regard both the master and the servant as persons of extraordinary abilities. And as to the wag who amuses himself on the first of April with telling lies, he must be shallow indeed, if he hope by so doing to acquire any superiority over another man, whom he knows to be wiser and better than himself; for on these occasions, the

* See Spectator, Numb. 47.

greatness of the joke, and the loudness of the laugh, are, if I rightly remember, in exact proportion to the sagacity of the person imposed on. What our author, in the same paper, says of buts in conversation, makes rather against his theory than for it. No man, who has any pretensions to good manners, to common understanding, or even to common humanity, will ever think of making a but of that person who has neither sense nor spirit to defend himself. Sir John Falstaff would not have excelled so much in this character, if he had not equally excelled in warding off and retorting raillery. The truth is, the but of the company is generally known to be one of the wittiest and best humoured persons in it; so that the mirth he may diffuse around him cannot be supposed to arise from his apparent inferiority.

If laughter arose from pride, and that pride from a sudden conception of some present eminency in ourselves, compared with others, or compared with ourselves as we were formerly; it would follow, that the wise, the beautiful, the strong, the healthy, and the rich, must giggle away a great part of their lives, because they would every now and then become suddenly sensible of their superiority over the foolish, the homely, the feeble, the sickly, and

the poor; that one would never recollect the transactions of one's childhood, or the absurdity of one's dreams, without merriment; that in the company of our equals we should always be grave; and that sir Isaac Newton must have been the greatest wag of his time.

That the passion of laughter, though not properly the effect of pride, does however, arise from a conception of some small fault or turpitude, or at least from some fancied inferiority, in the ludicrous object, has been asserted by several writers. One would indeed be apt at first hearing to reply, that we often smile at a witty performance or passage, such as Butler's allusion to a boiled lobster, in his picture of the morning,* when we are so far from conceiving any inferiority or turpitude in the author, that we greatly admire his genius, and wish ourselves possessed of that very turn of fancy which produced the drollery in question. "But "as we may be betrayed into a momentary be- "lief, that Garrick is really Abel Drugger; so "it is said, we may imagine a transient infe- "riority, either real or assumed, even in a per-

* The sun had long since in the lap
Of Thetis taken out his nap,
And like a lobster boil'd, the morn
From black to red began to turn.

"son whom we admire; and that, when we "smile at Butler's allusion, we for a moment "conceive him to have assumed the character "of one who was incapable to discern the im- "propriety of such an odd union of images. "We smile at the logick, wherewith Hudibras "endeavours to solace himself, when he is set "in the stocks,

> As beards, the nearer that they tend
> To th' earth, grow still more reverend;
> And cannons shoot the higher pitches,
> The lower you let down their breeches,
> I'll make this present abject state
> Advance me to a greater height.

"Here, it is said, that the laugh arises from "our supposing the author to assume for a "moment the character of one who, from his "ignorance of the nature of things, and of the "rules of analogical reasoning, does not per- "ceive, that the case he argues *from* is totally "unlike the case he argues *to*, nor, conse- "quently, that the argument is a sophism. If "we smile at the ass, in the fable, fawning "upon his master, in imitation of the spaniel; "or at the frog puffing and swelling to stretch "himself to the size of the ox, it is (we are told) "because we perceive something singularly "defective in the passions or sentiment of those

same time in their looks a mutual antipathy and reluctance, I believe the sight would have been entertaining enough, especially if believed to be accidental. Our coffeehouse politicians were lately betrayed into a smile, by one Papirius Cursor, a wag who read the newspapers quite across the page, without minding the space that distinguishes the columns, and so pretended to light upon some very amusing combinations. These were no doubt the contrivance of Papirius himself; but, supposing them to have been accidental, and that the printer had without design neglected to separate his columns, I ask whether they would have been less ridiculous? The joke I shall allow to be as wretched as you please: but we are not now talking of the *delicacies* of wit or humour, (which will be touched upon in the sequel) but of those combinations of ideas that provoke laughter. And here let me beg of the critick, not to take offence at the familiarity of these examples. I shall apologise for them afterwards. Meantime he will be pleased to consider, that my subject is a familiar one, and the phenomenon I would account for as frequent among clowns and children as among philosophers.

III. Hutcheson has given another account of the ludicrous quality. He seems to think,

that, "it is the contrast or opposition of dig-"nity and meanness that occasions laughter." Granting this to be true, (and how far this is true will appear by and by) I would observe, in the first place, what the ingenious author seems to have been aware of, that there may be a mixture of meanness and dignity, where there is nothing ludicrous. A city, considered as a collection of low and lofty houses, is no laughable object. Nor was that personage either ludicrous or ridiculous, whom Pope so justly characterises,

> The greatest, wisest, meanest, of mankind.

But, secondly, cases might be mentioned, of laughter arising from a group of ideas or objects, where there is no discernible opposition of meanness and dignity. We are told of the dagger of Hudibras, that

> It could scrape trenchers, or chip bread,
> Toast cheese or bacon, though it were
> To bait a mouse trap, 'twould not care;
> 'Twould make clean shoes, or in the earth
> Set leeks and onions, and so forth.

The humour of the passage cannot arise from the meanness of these offices compared with the dignity of the dagger, nor from any

opposition of meanness and dignity in the offices themselves, they being all equally mean; and must therefore be owing to some other peculiarity in the description. We laugh, when a droll mimicks the solemnity of a grave person; here dignity and meanness are indeed united: but we laugh also (though not so heartily perhaps) when he mimicks the peculiarities of a fellow as insignificant as himself, and displays no opposition of dignity and meanness. The levities of Sancho Pancha opposed to the solemnity of his master, and compared with his own schemes of preferment, form an entertaining contrast: but some of the vagaries of that renowned squire are truely laughable, even when his preferment and his master are out of the question. We do not perceive any contrast of meanness and dignity in mistress Quickly, sir Toby in *Twelfth Night*, the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, or Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale;* yet they are all ludicrous characters. Dr. Harrison in Fielding's *Amelia* is never mean, but always respectable; yet there is a dash of humour in him, which often betrays the reader into a smile. Men laugh at puns; the wisest and wittiest of our species have laughed at them; queen Elizabeth, Cicero, and Shakspeare, laughed at them: clowns and children laugh

at them; and most men, at one time or other, are inclined to do the same: but in this sort of low wit, is it an opposition of meanness and dignity that entertains us? Is it not rather a mixture of sameness and diversity; sameness in the sound, and diversity in the signification?

IV. Akenside, in the third book of his excellent poem, treats of ridicule at considerable length. He gives a detail of ridiculous characters; ignorant pretenders to learning, boastful soldiers, and lying travellers, hypocritical churchmen, conceited politicians, old women that talk of their charms and virtue, ragged philosophers who rail at riches, *virtuosi* intent upon trifles, romantick lovers, wits wantonly satirical, fops that out of vanity affect to be diseased and profligate, dastards who are ashamed or afraid without reason, and fools who are ignorant of what they ought to know. These characters may no doubt be set in such a light as to move at once our *laughter* and *contempt*, and are therefore truly *ridiculous*, and fit objects of comick satire: but the author does not distinguish between what is *laughable* in them and what is *contemptible;* so that we have no reason to think, that he meant to specify the qualities peculiar to those things that provoke *pure laughter*. Having finished the detail of characters,

he makes some general remarks on the cause of ridicule; and explains himself more fully in a prose definition illustrated by examples. The definition, or rather description, is in these words. "That which makes objects ridiculous, "is some ground of admiration or esteem "connected with other more general circum- "stances comparatively worthless or deformed; "or it is some circumstance of turpitude or "deformity connected with what is in general "excellent or beautiful: the inconsistent pro- "perties existing either in the objects them- "selves, or in the apprehension of the person "to whom they relate; belonging always to the "same order or class of being; implying senti- "ment and design; and exciting no acute or "vehement emotion of the heart." Whatever account we make of this definition, which to those who acquiesce in the foregoing reasonings may perhaps appear not quite satisfactory, there is in the poem a passage that deserves particular notice, as it seems to contain a more exact account of the ludicrous quality, than is to be found in any of the theories above mentioned. This passage will be quoted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

Laughter seems to arise from the View of Things incongruous united in the same Assemblage; I. *By Juxtaposition;* II. *As Cause and Effect;* III. *By Comparison founded on Similitude;* or, IV. *United so as to exhibit an Opposition of Meanness and Dignity.*

HOWEVER imperfect these theories may appear, there is none of them destitute of merit: and indeed the most fanciful philosopher seldom frames a theory, without consulting nature, in some of her most obvious appearances. Laughter very frequently arises from the view of dignity and meanness united in the same object; sometimes no doubt, from the appearance of assumed inferiority,* as well as of small

* Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift, in some of their most humorous pieces, assume the character, and affect the ignorance, of Grubstreet writers; and from this circumstance part of the humour of such papers will perhaps be found to arise. "Valde hæc ridentur (says Cicero) "quæ a prudentibus, quasi per dissimulationem non "intelligendi, subabsurde falseque dicuntur." De Orat. II. 68

faults and unimportant turpitudes; and sometimes, perhaps, though rarely, from that sort of pride, which is described in the passage quoted from Mr. Hobbes by Addison.

All these accounts agree in this, that the cause of laughter is something compounded; or something that disposes the mind to form a comparison, by passing from one object or idea to another. That this is in fact the case, cannot be proved *a priori;* but this holds in all the examples hitherto given, and will be found to hold in all that are given hereafter. May it not then be laid down as a principle, that "laughter "arises from the view of two or more objects "or ideas, disposing the mind to form a com-"parison?" According to the theory of Hobbes, this comparison would be between the ludicrous object and ourselves, according to those writers who misapply Aristotle's definition, it would seem to be formed between the ludicrous object and other things or persons in general; and if we incline to Hutcheson's theory, which is the best of the three, we shall think that there is a comparison of the parts of the ludicrous object, first with one another, and secondly with ideas or things extraneous.

Further: Every appearance that is made up of parts, or that leads the mind of the beholder

to form a comparison, is not ludicrous. The body of a man or woman, of a horse, a fish, or a bird, is not ludicrous, though it consists of many parts; and it may be compared to many other things without raising laughter: but the picture described in the beginning of the epistle to the Pisoes, with a man's head, a horse's neck, feathers of different birds, limbs of different beasts, and the tail of a fish, would have been thought ludicrous eighteen hundred years ago, if we believe Horace, and in certain circumstances would no doubt be so at this day. It would seem then, that "the parts of a laughable assem-
"blage must be in some degree unsuitable and
"heterogeneous."

Moreover: Any one of the parts of the Horatian monster, a human head, a horse's neck, the tail of a fish, the plumage of a fowl, is not ludicrous in itself; nor would those several parts be ludicrous, if attended to in succession, without any view to their union. For to see them disposed on different shelves of a museum, or even on the same shelf, nobody would laugh, except perhaps the thought of uniting them were to occur to his fancy, or the passage of Horace to his memory. It seems to follow, "that the in-
"congruous parts of a laughable idea or object
"must either be combined so as to form an as-

" semblage, or must be supposed to be so com-
" bined."

May we not then conclude, that " laughter " arises from the view of two or more incon-
" sistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or " circumstances, considered as united in one " complex object or assemblage, or as acquir-
" ing a sort of mutual relation from the pecu-
" liar manner in which the mind takes notice " of them?" The lines from Akenside, formerly referred to, seem to point at the same doctrine:

> Where'er the power of Ridicule displays
> Her quainteyed visage, *some incongruous form,*
> *Some stubborn dissonance of things combined,*
> Strikes on the quick observer.

And, to the same purpose, the learned and ingenious Dr. Gerard, in his *Essay on Taste:* " The sense of ridicule is gratified by an incon-
" sistence and dissonance of circumstances in " the same object, or in objects nearly related " in the main; or by a similitude or relation un-
" expected between things on the whole opposite " and unlike."

And therefore, instead of saying with Hutcheson, that the cause or object of laughter is an " opposition of dignity and meanness," I would say, in more general terms, that it is, " an oppo-

" sition of suitableness and unsuitableness, or of " relation and the want of relation, united, or " supposed to be united, in the same assem- " blage." Thus the offices ascribed to the dagger of Hudibras seem quite heterogeneous; but we discover a bond of connection among them, when we are told, that the same weapon could occasionally perform them all. Thus, even in that mimickry, which displays no opposition of dignity and meanness, we perceive the actions of one man joined to the features and body of another; that is, a mixture of unsuitableness, a want of relation, arising from the difference of persons, with congruity and similitude, arising from the sameness of the actions. Thus, at first view, the dawn of the morning, and a boiled lobster, seem utterly incongruous, unlike, and (as Biondello says of Petruchio's stirrups) " of no " kindred;" but when a change of colour from black to red is suggested, we recognize a likeness, and consequently a relation, or ground of comparison.

And here let it be observed in general, that, the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the same assemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be. If, as in the last example, there be an opposition of dignity and meanness, as well as of likeness and dissimili-

tude, the effect of the contrast will be more powerful, than if only one of these oppositions had appeared in the ludicrous idea. The sublimity of Don Quixote's mind contrasted and connected with his miserable equipage, forms a very comical exhibition; but when all this is still further connected and contrasted with Sancho Pancha, the ridicule is heightened exceedingly. Had the knight of the lions been better mounted and accoutred, he would not have made us smile so often; because the hero's mind and circumstances being more adequately matched, the whole group would have united fewer inconsistencies, and reconciled fewer incongruities. No particular in this equipment is without its use. The ass of Sancho, and the horse of his master; the knight tall and rawboned, the squire fat and short; the one brave, solemn, generous, learned, and courteous, the other not less remarkable for cowardice, levity, selfishness, ignorance, and rusticity; the one absurdly enamoured of an ideal mistress, the other ridiculously fond of his ass; the one devoted to glory, the other enslaved to his belly: it is not easy out of two persons, to make up a more multifarious contrast. Butler has however combined a still greater variety of uncouth and jarring circumstances in Ralpho and Hudibras: but the picture, though more

elaborate, is less natural. Yet this argues no defect of judgment. His design was, to make his hero not only ludicrous, but contemptible; and therefore he jumbles together, in his equipage and person, a number of mean and disgusting qualities, pedantry, ignorance, nastiness, and extreme deformity. But the knight of La Mancha, though a ludicrous, was never intended for a contemptible personage. He often moves our pity, he never forfeits our esteem; and his adventures and sentiments are generally interesting, which could not have been the case, if his story had not been natural, and himself endowed with great as well as good qualities. To have given him such a shape, and such weapons, arguments, boots, and breeches, as Butler has bestowed on his champion, would have destroyed that solemnity, which is so striking a feature in Don Quixote: and Hudibras, with the manners and person of the Spanish hero, would not have been that paltry figure, which the English poet meant to hold up to the laughter and contempt of his countrymen. Sir Launcelot Greaves is of Don Quixote's kindred, but a different character. Smollet's design was, not to expose him to ridicule, but rather to recommend him to our pity and admiration. He has therefore given him youth, strength, and beauty, as well as courage,

and dignity of mind, has mounted him on a generous steed, and arrayed him in an elegant suit of armour. Yet that the history might have a comick air, he has been careful to contrast and connect sir Launcelot with a squire and other associates of very dissimilar tempers and circumstances.

What has been said of the cause of laughter does not amount to an exact description, far less to a logical definition: there being innumerable combinations of congruity and inconsistency, of relation and contrariety, of likeness and dissimilitude, which are not ludicrous at all. If we could ascertain the peculiarities of these, we should be able to characterise with more accuracy the general nature of ludicrous combination. But before we proceed to this, it would be proper to evince, that of the present theory thus much at least is true, that though every incongruous combination is not ludicrous, every ludicrous combination is incongruous.

It is only by a detail of facts or examples, that any theory of this sort can be either established or overthrown. By such a detail the foregoing theories have been, or may be, shown to be illfounded, or not sufficiently comprehensive. A single instance of a laughable object, which neither unites, nor is supposed to unite

incongruous ideas, would likewise show the insufficiency of the present: nor will I undertake to prove, (for indeed I cannot) that no such instance can be given. A complete enumeration of ludicrous objects it would be vain to attempt: and therefore we can never hope to ascertain, beyond the possibility of doubt, that common quality which belongs to all ludicrous ideas that are, or have been, or may be imagined. All that can be done in a case of this kind is to prove, by a variety of examples, that the theory now proposed is more comprehensive, and better founded, than any of the foregoing.

Many are the modes of combination by which incongruous qualities may be presented to the eye, or to the fancy, so as to provoke laughter: and of incongruity itself, as of falsehood, the forms may be diversified without end. An *exact arrangement* of ludicrous examples is therefore as unattainable as a *complete enumeration*. Something, however, of this sort we must attempt, to avoid running into confusion.

I. One of the simplest modes of combination, is that which arises from *contiguity*. Things incongruous are often laughable, when united as parts of a system, or simply *when placed together*. That dialogue of Erasmus, called *absurda*, which looks like a conversation between two deaf men,

seems to be an attempt to raise laughter, by the mere juxtaposition of unconnected sentences. But the attempt is rather unsuccessful; this sort of cross purposes being too obvious, and too little surprising, to yield entertainment.

1. Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, all admit, that bodily singularities may be laughable;* and, according to the first of these authors, that is a ridiculous countenance, in which there is deformity and distortion without distress. Any feature, particularly one of the middle features, a nose, a mouth, or a chin, uncommonly large, may, when attended with no inconvenience, tempt one to smile; as appears from the effect of caricatura in painting. We read in the Spectator,† of a number of men with long chins, whom a wag at Bath invited to dine with him; and are told, that a great deal of mirth passed on the occasion. Here was a collection of incongruities related not only by mutual similitude, but also by juxtaposition; a circumstance that would naturally heighten the ludicrous effect. Yet here was no mixture of dignity and meanness; and the meet-

* Arist. Poet. § 5.; Cicero de Orat. ii. 239.; Quint. Inst. Or. vi. 3.

† Number 371.

ing, if it had been accidental, would not have been less laughable.

2. A country dance of men and women, like those exhibited by Hogarth in his *Analysis of Beauty*, could hardly fail to make a beholder merry, whether he believed their union to be the effect of design or of accident. Most of those persons have incongruities of their own, in their shape, dress, or attitude, and all of them are incongruous in respect of one another; thus far the assemblage displays contrariety or want of relation: and they are all united in the same place, and in the same dance; and thus far they are mutually related. And if we suppose the two elegant figures removed, which might be done without lessening the ridicule, we should not easily discern any contrast of dignity and meanness in the group that remains.

3. Almost the same remarks might be made on *The enraged Musician*, another piece of the same great master, of which a witty author quaintly says, that it *deafens* one to *look* at it. This extraordinary group forms a very comical mixture of incongruity and relation; of incongruity, owing to the dissimilar employments and appearances of the several persons, and to the variety and dissonance of their respective noises; and of relation, owing to their being all united in

the same place, and for the same purpose, of tormenting the poor fiddler. From the various sounds cooperating to this one end, the piece becomes more laughable, than if their meeting were conceived to be without any particular destination; for the greater the number of relations, as well as of contrarieties, that take place in any ludicrous assemblage, the more ludicrous it will generally appear. Yet though this group comprehends not any mixture of meanness and dignity, it would, I think, be allowed to be laughable to a certain degree, merely from the juxtaposition of the objects, even though it were supposed to be accidental.

Groups of this sort, if accurately described, are no doubt entertaining, when expressed in words, as well as when presented to the eye by means of colour. But it would require many words to do justice to so great a variety of things and persons; which therefore could not be apprehended by the mind, but gradually and in succession; and hence the jarring coincidencies of the whole would be less discernible in a poetical description, than in a print or picture. The ludicrous effect, that arises from the mere *contiguity* of the objects, may therefore be better exemplified by visible assemblages delineated by the painter, than by such as are conveyed to the

mind by verbal description.* Yet even by this vehicle, burlesque combinations may be suggested to the fancy, which in part derive the ludicrous character from the *juxtaposition* of the component parts. Take an example or two.

* But it does not follow, that painting is a more copious source of risible emotion, than those arts are which affect the mind by means of language. Painting is no doubt more lively in description than poetry: and, by presenting a whole composition to the eye at once, may strike the mind with a more diversified and more emphatical impulse. What we see, too, we apprehend more easily than what we only conceive from narration;

> Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
> Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ
> Ipse sibi tradit spectator.

But the descriptive powers of painting are subject to many limitations. It cannot mark the progress of action or thought, because it exhibits the events of one instant of time; nor has it any expression for intellectual notions nor for those calmer affections of the soul that produce no visible change on the body. But poetry can describe every energy of mind, and phenomenon of matter; and every variety, however minute, of character, sentiment, and passion, as it appears in each period of its progress. And innumerable combinations, both of sublime and of ludicrous ideas there are, which the pencil cannot trace out, but which are easily conveyed to the mind by speech or writing.

4. "If a man (says the *Tatler*, speaking of "the utility of advertisements) has pains in his "head, colicks in his bowels, or spots in his "clothes, he may there meet with proper cures "and remedies. If a man would recover a wife, "or a horse that is stolen or strayed; if he wants "new sermons, electuaries, or asses milk, or "any thing else, either for his body or his mind, "this is the place to look for them in.*

5. He sung of Taffy Welch and Sawney Scot,
Lillibullero, and the Irish trot;
The bower of Rosamond, and Robin Hood,
And how the grass now grows where Troy town stood;
Then he was seiz'd with a religious qualm,
And on a sudden sung the hundredth psalm.†

6. Incongruous ideas, related by contiguity, do sometimes acquire a closer connection, and may become more laughable, when their names being made equally dependent upon one and the same verb, confer on it two or more incongruous significations.

"It is observable, (says Pope of prince Eu-"gene) that this general is a great taker of "snuff, as well as of towns."‡

* Tatler, Numb. 224

† Gay's Pastorals. See *Rape of the Lock*, ii. 105—110.

‡ Key to the Lock. In all wit of this sort, when laughter is intended, it will perhaps be necessary to blend great-

An opposition of dignity and meanness, or of greatness and littleness, is no doubt observable in these examples. Yet description may sometimes be laughable, when the ideas or phrases are related by juxtaposition only, and imply no perceptible contrast of dignity and meanness. Swift's inventory of his household stuff, "An "oaken broken elbowchair, "A caudlecup with-"out an ear," &c. is truly laughable; at least we

ness with littleness, or to form some other glaring contrast. Ovid and Cowley are fond of these quaint conceits, but seldom raise a smile by them, and surely did not intend any.

Consiliis non curribus utere nostris. *Metamorph. lib.* 2.

And not my chariot, but my counsel take. *Addison.*

But now the early birds began to call
The morning forth: uprose the Sun and Saul.
Davideis.

"A horse (says a certain serious, but flowery author) "may throw his rider, and at once dash his body against "the stones, and soul into the other world."

Such witticism in a serious work is offensive to a reader of taste, (see Hurd's Commentary on the Epistle to Augustus, vers. 97.) and we are not apt to laugh at that which offends us. To the author it is probably the object of admiration, and we seldom laugh at what we greatly admire.

are sure that he thought it so: the *various* and *dissimilar* articles specified in it are *similar* and *uniform* in this one respect, that they are all worn out, imperfect, or useless; but their meanness is without any mixture of dignity. Sancho's proverbs often provoke a smile; not because some are low and others elevated, but because, though *unconnected* both with the subject and with one another, they happen to be spoken *at the same time*, and absurdly applied to the same purpose. I have heard that mirth may be promoted amongst idle people by the following expedient. On the top of a page of paper, one of the company writes a line which he covers with a book; another adds a second, and conceals it in the same manner; and thus the paper goes from hand to hand, till it be full, nobody knowing what the others have written: then the covering is taken off, and the whole read over, as if it were a continued discourse. Here the principal bond of union is juxtaposition; and yet, though united by this alone, and though accidentally united, the incongruities may be laughable; though no doubt the joke would be heightened, if there should also happen to be a mixture of meanness and dignity. And the same thing will be found to hold true of those musical contrivances called *medleys*.

7. Even when art is not used to disunite them,

human thoughts under no restraint are apt to become ridiculously wild and incongruous. When his mind unbends itself into a reverie, and, without attending to any particular object, permits the ideas to appear and glide away according to the caprice of undirected fancy, the gravest philosopher would be shy of giving permanence to such a jumble by speech or writing;* lest by its odd incongruities it should raise a laugh at his expense, and show that his thoughts were not quite so regular as he wished the world to believe. We need not then wonder, that, when persons of light minds are made to *think aloud* upon the stage, their rhapsodies should prove so entertaining. Juliet's *nurse* and *Mrs. Quickly*, are characters of this sort. And we meet with many such in real life; whose ravings are laughable, even when they exhibit no mixture of meanness and dignity, and when mere *juxtaposition* is the chief bond of union among their ideas.

II. The mind naturally considers as part of the same assemblage, and joins together in one view, those objects that appear in the relation of *cause and effect*. Hence when things, in other respects *unrelated* or *incongruous*, are found or

* See the *Spectator*, Numb. 225.

supposed to be *thus related*, they sometimes provoke laughter.

1. "Really, madam, (says Filch in the *Beggar's "Opera*) I fear I shall be cut off in the flower of "my youth; so that every now and then since I "was *pumpt*, I have thoughts of taking up and "going *to sea*." It is the cause of this resolution that makes it ludicrous. One sort of water suggests another to the thief's fancy; and the fresh water pump puts him in mind of a similar implement belonging to ships. There is something unexpected, and incongruous in the thought, and at the same time an appearance of natural connection.

2. There is a sort of ironical reasoning, not easily described, which would seem to derive the ludicrous character from a surprising mixture of plausibility and absurdity: and which, on account of the real disagreement, though seeming affinity, of the conclusion considered as the *effect*, with the premises considered as the *cause*, may not improperly be referred to this head; though perhaps, from the real *dissimilitude*, and unexpected appearance of *likeness*, in the circumstances whereon the argument is founded, it might with equal propriety be referred to the following. Several humorous examples of this kind of sophistry may be seen in that excellent

English ballad called *The Tippling Philosophers*. Hudibras also abounds in it. Such are the lines already quoted, in which he draws comfort from the disaster of being set in the stocks; and such are those well known passages, that prove morality to be a crime, and honour to lodge in that part of the human body where it is most liable to be wounded by a kick.*

3. A cause and effect extremely inadequate to each other form a ludicrous combination. We smile at the child (in *Quarles's Emblems*) attempting to blow out the sun with a pair of bellows. Nor is it much less ridiculous to see heroes, in a tragedy or opera, breathing their last in a longwinded similitude, or musical cadence. The tailor of Laputa, taking measure for a suit of clothes with a quadrant; the wise men of Lagado carrying vast loads of *things* about with them, that they might converse together without impairing their lungs by the use of speech; and several of the other projects recorded in the same admirable satire,† are ludicrous in the highest degree, from the utter disproportion of the effect to the cause. The same remark may

* See Hudibras, part 2. canto 3. vers. 1065; and part 3. canto 1. vers. 1290.

† Gulliver's voyage to Laputa.

be made upon that part of sir John Enville's complaint, where he says (speaking of his lady) "She dictates to me in my own business, sets "me right in point of trade; and, if I disagree "with her about any of my ships at sea, wonders "that I will dispute with her, when I know very "well that her great grandfather was a flag-"officer."* Violent anger occasioned by slight injury makes a man ridiculous; we *despise* his levity, and *laugh* at his absurdity. All excessive passion, when it awakens not sympathy, is apt to provoke laughter; nor do we heartily sympathize with any malevolent, nor indeed with any violent emotions, till we know their cause, or have reason to think them well founded. With such as we have no experience of, we rarely sympathize; and the view of them in others, especially when immoderate, gives rise to merriment. The distress of the miser when his hoard is stolen, and the transport wherewith he receives it back, though the most intense feelings of which he is capable, are more apt to move our laughter, than our sorrow or joy: and in the *Aulularia* of Plautus, a great deal of comick ridicule is founded on this circumstance. Ranting in tragedy is laughable, because we know the cause

* Spectator, Numb. 299.

to be inadequate to the effect; and because a distorted imitation of nature implies a contrast of likeness and dissimilitude: but the opposite fault of insipidity, either in acting or in writing, unless accompanied with something peculiarly absurd, is not laughable; because it does not rouse the attention, and has not that *uncommonness*, which (as will be shown hereafter) generally belongs to ludicrous combination. This difference in the effects of theatrical impropriety is hinted at by Horace;

—— Male si mandata loqueris,
Aut *dormitabo*, aut *ridebo*.*——

Immoderate fear in another, when there seems to be no sufficient cause for it, and when we ourselves are at ease; like that of sir Hugh Evans, when he is going to fight the French doctor, is highly ridiculous; both because it is excessive, and because it produces a conflict of discordant passions, and an unconnected effusion of words.†

* Ar. Poet. vers. 105.

† "Pless my soul! how full of cholers I am, and tremp-
"ling of mind! I shall be glad if he have deceived me.
"How melancholies I am! I will knog his urinals about
"his knave's costard, when I have good opportunities
"for the orke. Pless my soul! *To shallow rivers, to*

4. An emotion that ought to be important venting itself in frivolous language, or insipid behaviour, would no doubt make us smile, if it did not occasion disappointment, or some other powerful feeling subversive of laughter. When Blackmore, in his paraphrases of holy writ, shows, by the meanness of his words and figures, that instead of having an adequate sense of the dignity of the subject, his mind was wandering after the most paltry conceits, our laughter is prevented by our indignation. Or if ever we are betrayed into a smile by such a couplet as the following,

> On thee, O Jacob, I thy jealous God
> Vast heaps of heavy mischief will unload. —*

it must be in some unguarded moment, when, our disgust being less keen than it ought to be, the ludicrous emotion is permitted to operate.

5. Every body knows, that hyperbole is a source of the sublime; and it is equally true, that amplification is a source of humour. But as that which is intrinsically mean cannot be made great, so neither can real excellence be

" *whose falls Melodious birds sing madrigals;* (singing)—" *To shallow*—Mercy on me! I have a great disposition " to cry. *When as I sate in Pabilon,*" &c.
Merry Wives of Windsor, act 3. *sc.* 1.

* Blackmore's song of Moses.

rendered laughable, by mere amplification. A coxcomb, by exaggerating the charms of a beautiful woman, may make himself ridiculous, but will hardly make them so. But a deformity of feature, that is ludicrous in a low degree, may by exaggeration be made more ludicrous: witness Falstaff's account of Bardolph's fiery coloured face.* The following is a Grecian conceit; and so highly valued by Strada, that he takes the trouble to explain it in a copious paraphrase.

> In vain to wipe his nose old Ploclus tries;
> That mass his most expansive grasp defies:
> Sneezing he says not, "Bless me;" so remote
> His nostril from his ear, he hears it not.†

Strobilus in the play ridicules the miser, by saying, "That he saved the parings of his nails,

* First part of king Henry IV. act 3. sc. 3.

† This epigram appears to more advantage in the Greek, on account of the great simplicity of the expression.

> Ου δύναται τῆ χειρὶ Πρόκλος την ῥιν' ἀπομυσσειν,
> Τῆς ῥινος γαρ ἐχει την χερα μικροτεραν.
> Οὐδε λέγει Ζεῦ σῶσον, ἐαν πταρῆ· ἡ γαρ ἀκουει
> Τῆς ῥινος, πολυ γαρ τῆς ἀκοῆς απεχει.

See Strada. *Pistor Suburranus.* Longinus gives this example of a ludicrous hyperbole.

> Ἄγρον ἐσχ' ἐλαττω γῆν ἐχοντ' ἀρ' ἐπισολῆς
> Λακωνικῆς. *De subl. sect. 37.*

"He was owner of a field not so large as a Lacede-

" and used to exclaim, that he was undone when " he saw the smoke of his fire escaping through " the chimney."* But the most profligate wag that ever appeared in modern comedy could not make the moral or intellectual virtues of a good man ridiculous, merely by magnifying them; though, by misrepresenting, or by connecting her with ludicrous imagery, he might no doubt raise a momentary smile at the expense even of Virtue herself.

Humorous amplification will generally be found to imply a mixture of plausibility and absurdity, or of likeness and dissimilitude. Butler's hero speaks in very hyperbolical terms of the acute feelings occasioned by kicking and cudgelling:

> Some have been beaten, till they know
> What wood the cudgel's of, by the blow;
> Some kick'd, until they can feel, whether
> A shoe be Spanish or neat's leather.†

The fact is impossible: hence the *want of relation* between the cause and the pretended effect.

" monian epistle;" which sometimes consisted of no more than two or three words. Vide Quintil. Orat. Inst. lib. 8. cap. 3. & 6. Greek and Latin, we see, may be quoted on trifling as well as important subjects.

* Plaut. Aulul. act 2. sc. 4.

† Hubibras, part 2. canto 1. vers. 221

Yet when we reflect, that the qualities of wood and leather are perceived by sense, and that some of them may be perceived by the touch or feeling, there appears something like plausibility in what is said; and hence the *seeming relation* between the pretended effect and the cause. And an additional incongruity presents itself, when we compare the seriousness of the speaker with the absurdity of what is spoken. When Smollet, in one of his novels, describing violent fear, says, "He stared like the gorgon's head, with "his mouth wide open, and each particular hair "crawling and twining like an animated ser-"pent," he raises the portrait far above nature; but at the same time gives it an apparent plausibility, from the effect which fear is supposed to have in making the hair stand on an end. It is, I confess, an awkward thing, to comment upon these and the like passages: and I am afraid, the reader may be tempted to say of the ludicrous quality in the hands of one who thus analizes it, that,

> Like following life in creatures we dissect
> We lose it in the moment we detect.

But I hope it will be considered, that I have no other way of explaining my subject in a satisfactory manner. One cannot lay open the elementary

parts of any animal or vegetable system, without violating its outward beauty.

As hyperboles are very common, being used by all persons on almost all occasions,* it might be supposed, that, by the frequency of this figure, mirth could easily be promoted in conversation, and a character for humour acquired, with little expense of thought, and without any powers of genius. But that would be a mistake. Familiar hyperboles excite neither laughter nor astonishment. All ludicrous and all sublime exaggeration, is characterised by an uncommonness of thought or language. And laughable appearances in general, whether exhibited to the senses or to the fancy, will for the most part be found to imply something unexpected, and to produce some degree of surprise.

III. Laughter often arises from the discovery of unexpected *likeness* between objects apparently *dissimilar:* and the greater the apparent dissimilitude, and new discovered resemblance, the greater will be the surprise attending the discovery, the more striking the opposition of contrariety and relation, and the more lively the risible emotion. All men, and all children, have a tendency to mark resemblances; hence the allegories, similes, and metaphors, so frequent

* See Essay on Poetry, part 2 chap. 1. sect. 3. § 5.

in common discourse: but readily to find out similitudes that are not obvious, and were never found out before, is no ordinary talent. The person possessed of it is called a man of *wit;* especially if at the same time he possess that other talent of conveying his meaning in concise, perspicuous, and natural language. For I agree with Locke, that "Wit consists chiefly in the assem-"blage of ideas, and putting those together with "quickness and variety wherein can be found "any resemblance or congruity, thereby to "make up pleasant pictures and agreeable "visions in the fancy:"* And I also agree with Pope, that "an easy delivery, as well as perfect "conception;" and with Dryden, that "propriety "of words as well as of thought," is necessary to the formation of true wit. Images and comparisons, conveyed in obscure terms, or in too many words, have little effect upon the mind, because they oblige us to take up time in collecting all the parts of the idea; which must lessen our surprise, and abate the vivacity of the consequent emotion: and if the language, instead of being natural, were quaint and elaborate, we should be disgusted, from an opinion, that the whole was the effect of art, rather than the instantaneous effort of a playful imagination.

* Essay on Human Understanding, book 2. chap. 11. § 2

It is a rule in serious writing, that similitudes should be neither too obvious, nor too remote. If too obvious, they offend by their insignificancy, give a mean opinion of the author's inventive powers, and afford little variety, because they suggest that only which the reader supposes himself to be already acquainted with. If too remote, they distract the reader's attention; and they show, that the author's fancy is wandering from his subject, and therefore that he himself is not suitably affected with it; a fault which we blame in a serious writer, as well as in a publick speaker or player. Familiar allusions, such as every body may make every day, are to be avoided in humorous composition also; not only because they are insignificant, yield no variety, and give a mean idea of the author, but likewise because they have not incongruity enough to be ludicrous:* for when

* Swift's Song of Similes, *My passion is as mustard strong*, &c. will perhaps occur to the reader as an exception. And it is true of that humorous piece, that most of the comparisons are not only common, but even proverbial. But then there is, in the way of applying them, a species of novelty, that shows a lively and singular turn of fancy in the author, and occasions an agreeable surprise to the reader: and the mutual relation, owing to the juxtaposition, of so many dissonant ideas and incongruous proverbs, cannot fail to heighten greatly the

we have been long accustomed to compare certain things together, or to view them as united in the same assemblage, the one so constantly introduces the other into the mind, that we come to look upon them as congenial. But in ludicrous writing, comparisons, if the point of resemblance be clearly expressed, and the thing alluded to sufficiently known, can scarce be too remote: for here the author is not supposed to be in earnest, and therefore we allow full scope to his fancy; and here the more remote the comparison, the more heterogeneous are the objects compared, and the greater the contrast of congruity and unsuitableness.

Persons who would pass for wits are apt affectedly to interlard their ordinary discourse with similitudes; which, however, unless they are uncommon, as well as apposite, will only betray the barrenness of the speaker's fancy. Fielding ridicules this sort of pedantry, in a dialogue be-

ludicrous effect. Common, or even proverbial allusions may successfully enough be introduced into burlesque, when they surprise by the peculiarity of their application. In this case, though familiar in themselves, they are remote in regard to the subject, and apparently incongruous; and may therefore raise our opinion of the author's wit: as a clock made with the tools of a blacksmith would evince uncommon dexterity in the artist.

tween a bad poet and a player. "Plays (says the "man of rhyme) are like tress, which will not "grow without nourishment; but, like mush-"rooms, they shoot up spontaneously, as it were, "in a rich soil. The muses, like vines, may be "pruned, but not with a hatchet. The town, like "a peevish child, knows not what it desires, and "is always best pleased with a rattle."*

As some comparisons add to the beauty and sublimity of serious composition, so others may heighten the ludicrous effect of wit and humour. In what respects the former differ from the latter, will be seen afterwards. At present I shall only specify the several classes of ludicrous similitudes, and give an example or two in each, with a view to illustrate my theory.

1. One mean object may be compared to another mean object in such a way as to provoke laughter. In this case, as there is no opposition of meanness and dignity, it will be proper, in order to make the combination sufficiently incongruous, that the thing alluded to, if familiar in itself, be remote in regard to the subject, and such as one would not be apt to think of, on such an occasion.

* See the history of Joseph Andrews, book 3. chap. 10. The whole dialogue is exquisitely humorous.

" I do remember him (says Falstaff, speaking " of justice Shallow) at Clement's Inn, like a " man made after supper of a cheese paring. " When he was naked, he was for all the world " like a forked radish, with a head fantastically " carved upon it with a knife."*

> He snatch'd his whinyard up, that fled
> When he was falling off his steed,
> As rats do from a falling house.†

The reader will think, perhaps, that there is even in these examples something of greatness mixed with meanness, as well as in the following:

> Instead of trumpet and of drum,
> Which makes the warrior's stomach come,
> And whets men's valour sharp, like beer
> By thunder turn'd to vinegar,‡

but that mixture is more observable, when,

2. Things important, serious, or great, are ludicrously compared to such as are mean, frivolous, or vulgar. King Arthur, in the tragedy of Tom Thumb, hints at an analogy between two feelings, that were never before thought to have any thing in common.

> I feel a sudden pain within my breast,
> Nor know I, whether it proceed from love,
> Or only the wind colick. Time must show.

* Second part of K. Henry IV. act 3. † Hudibras. ‡ Idem.

" Wisdom (says Swift) is a fox, who, after long " hunting, will at last cost you the pains to dig " out: it is a cheese, which, by how much the " richer, has the thicker, the homelier, and the " coarser coat, and whereof, to a judicious palate, " the maggots are the best: it is a sack posset, " wherein the deeper you go, you will find it the " sweeter. Wisdom is a hen, whose cackling " we must value and consider, because it is at- " tended with an egg. But then, lastly, wisdom " is a nut, which, unless you choose with judg- " ment, may cost you a tooth, and pay you with " nothing but a worm."*

Musick in general, especially military musick, is an object of great dignity to the serious poet; he describes it with sublime allusions, and in the most harmonious language. Butler, by a contrary artifice, makes one species of it ridiculous.

> The kettle-drum, whose sullen dub
> Sounds—like the hooping of a tub.

3. Things in themselves ludicrous and mean may become more ludicrous, by being compared to such as are serious or great; and that, first, when the serious object alluded to is mentioned in simple terms, without debasement or exag-

* Introduction to the Tale of a Tub.

geration;* secondly, when it is purposely degraded by vulgar language and mean circumstances;† and, thirdly, when it is exhibited in all the pomp of numbers and description.‡ Examples of the two first cases are common in *burlesque:* the third is peculiar to the *mock heroick* style.

From these remarks it will appear, that the risible emotion may in various ways be raised or increased by comparison and similitude. Metaphor, allegory, and the other tropes and figures founded in resemblance, may in like manner heighten the effect of ludicrous composition.

Without multiplying examples, I shall only observe, of the allegory in particular, that, provided its design be important and obvious, a great disproportion, in point of dignity, between what it expresses and what it signifies, will not convey any ludicrous idea to a sound mind; unless where an author is at pains to degrade his allegory, either by the extreme meanness of the allusion, or by connecting it with something laughable in the circumstances or phraseology. The fables and parables of ancient times, were not intended to raise laughter, but to instruct mankind. Accordingly, those Greek apologues, which are ascribed to Esop, and bear undoubted marks of anti-

* See Hudibrass, part 1. can. 1. vers. 289.

† See Hudibras, part 2. can. 2. vers. 595.

‡ See Dunciad, book 2. vers. 181.

quity, are delivered in the most simple style, and without any effort to draw the reader's attention to ludicrous ideas, except when these make a part of the story.* But some modern fabulists, particularly L'Estrange, are anxious to have their fables considered, not only as instructive allegories, but also as merry tales; and, in order to make them such, frequently employ ludicrous images, and the most familiar diction. Whether this, or the ancient, form of the apologue, deserve the preference, I shall not now inquire. But I could wish, that where the moral was of great importance, and connected with sacred things, we had, in our fables, imitated rather the simplicity of ancient language, than the levity of modern wit. Ridiculous ideas, associated by custom, with religious truths, can have no good effect upon the mind. And in this view, the book called "*Scotch presbyterian eloquence displayed*," must ever be held in abhorrence by the friends

* And when there is any thing laughable in the circumstances, it often appears to greater advantage in the simple Greek, than in the most elaborate modern paraphrase. The reader may compare Αλώπηξ καὶ Κόραξ with *le corbeau et le renard* of Fontaine. The conclusion of the former is remarkably expressive and picturesque, as well as simple: Ο δὲ κόραξ ἀκούσας ταῦτα, καὶ κανυστὶς τῷ ῾παίνοις, ῥίψας τὸ κρέας, μεγάλως ἐκεκράγει, &c.

of religion, even though the writer could be vindicated from the charge of wilful and malicious falsehood. And I cannot but think, that in this view, even the *Tale of a Tub*, notwithstanding its unequalled merit as a piece of humorous writing, is blamable, in the general tenour of the allegory, as well as in particular passages. Are you then one of those gloomy mortals, who think religion an enemy to jocularity? By no means. If I were, I should not now be writing an essay on laughter. Christianity is, in my opinion, not merely a friend to cheerfulness, but the only thing in the world which can make a considerate mind rationally and permanently cheerful. But between smiling and sneering, between complacency and contempt, between innocent mirth and unseasonable buffoonery, there seems to me to be a very wide difference.

After what Addison in the *Spectator*, and Dryden in one of his long prefaces, have said against Hudibrastick rhymes, one can hardly venture to affirm, that a smile may sometimes be occasioned by those unexpected coincidencies of sound. I confess, however, that I have been entertained with them in Swift and Butler; and should think him a prudish critick who could turn up his nose at the following couplets:

> And pulpit, drum ecclesiastick
> Was beat with fist, instead of a stick.——

With words far bitterer than wormwood,
That would in Job or Grizel stir mood——
Though stored with deletery medicines,
Which whosoever took is dead since.——
There was an ancient sage philosopher,
Who had read Alexander Ross over.——

I grant, that these combinations, considered as wit, have little or no merit. Yet they seem to possess in a certain degree the ludicrous character, and to derive it from the *diversity* of the words and meaning as contrasted with the unexpected *similarity* of the sounds. In ordinary rhymes, the sound, being expected, gives no surprise; and, being common, seems natural, and a thing of course: but when two or three words, in the end of one line, correspond in sound to two or three syllables of the same word, in the end of another, the *jarring coincidence* is more striking and more surprising. But as they surprise the more, the less they are expected, and the less they seem to be sought for, these rhymes must lose their effect when too frequent. And the same thing must happen, when they are incorrect, on account of the imperfect resemblance, and because every body knows it is an easy matter to bring words together that have some *letters* only in common: and therefore one is rather offended than entertained with the rhyme of this couplet of Prior:

Know then, when Phebus' rays inspect us,
First, Sir, I read, and then I breakfast.

Hudibrastick rhymes can take place only in burlesque,* such trifling being unsuitable to all serious, poetry, and even to the affected solemnity of the mock heroick.

Some criticks, taking all their notions from the practice of Greece and Rome, have represented rhyme of every kind as a ridiculous thing. But that cannot be ridiculous, to which we are continually accustomed; which, independent on custom, is in itself almost universally pleasing; and which has acquired additional grace and dignity, by being so much used as an ornament in our

* Hobbes, partly by a rhyme of this kind, and partly by a misapprehension of Homer's language, has turned into gross burlesque one of the most admired descriptions in all poetry.

Ἦ. καὶ κυανέῃσιν ἐπ' ὀφρύσι νεῦσε Κρονίων·
Ἀμβρόσιαι δ' ἄρα χαῖται ἐπερρώσαντο ἄνακτος
Κρατὸς ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο, μέγαν δ' ἐλέλιξεν Ὄλυμπον, &c.
Iliad. I. 528.

This said, with his black brows he to her *nodded*.
Wherewith displayed were his locks divine;
Olympus shook at stirring of his *godhead;*
And Thetis from it jump'd into the brine.

The translator shows also his ignorance of the English tongue, in the use he makes of the last word of his third line

most beautiful compositions. Similarity of sound in contiguous verses gives pleasure to all children and illiterate persons, and does not naturally offend the ear of any modern European, however learned. Nay we have reason to think, that something of this sort, in the end or beginning* of

* A similarity of sound in the *beginning* of contiguous words, or rather in their initial consonants, has of late been called *alliteration*. Some authors speak of it in terms of the utmost contempt and abhorrence; and as if none but fools and fops could take any pleasure in it. And surely when it recurs often, and seems to be the effect of study, it gives a finical appearance to poetry, and becomes offensive. But that many good judges of poetical harmony have been pleased with it, might be made appear by innumerable examples from Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, and others. Indeed, previous to the influence of custom, it would not be easy to determine, whether a similarity of sound, in the beginning, or in the end, of contiguous words, were likely to produce the more rational, or more durable entertainment. That both alliteration and rhyme, though not equally perhaps, are however naturally, pleasing to the ears of most people, is evident, not only from what may be observed in children and peasants, but also from the composition of many of our old proverbs, in which some of the words seem to have been chosen for the sake of the initial letters; as, Many men many minds, Spare to speak and spare to speed, Money makes the mare to go, Love me little love me long, Manners make the man, &c. *Christ's kirl*

words, has in all ages been agreeable to all nations whatsoever, the Greeks and Romans not excepted. For to what other *ultimate* principle, than the love of similar final sounds, shall we ascribe the frequent coincidence, in termination, of the Greek and Latin participle and adjective, with the substantive? Homer himself often repeats certain harmonious syllables of similar sound; which he might have avoided, and with which, therefore, as he seems on some occasions rather to seek for than to shun them, we may presume that he was pleased.* It is true, the

on the green, and most of the old Scotch ballads, abound in alliteration. And some ancient English poems are more distinguished by this, than by any other poetical contrivance. In the works of Langland, even where no regard is had to rhyme and but little to a rude sort of anapestick rhythm, it seems to have been a rule, that three words at least of each line should begin with the same letter:

Death came driving after, and all to dust pashed
Kyngès and Kaysars, Knightès and Popes.

* Virgil has a few of the same sort,

Cornua velatarum obvertimus antennarum.
Eneid. III.

—— formæ magnorum ululare luporum.
Eneid. VII.

I do not find, that the ancient criticks have taken any

Greeks and Romans did not admit, in their poetry, those similar endings of lines, which we call rhyme. The reason probably was, that in the classical tongues, on account of their regular structure, like terminations were so frequent, that it required more dexterity, and occasioned a more pleasing suspense to the ear, to keep them separate, than to bring them together. But in the modern tongues the case is different; and therefore rhyme may in them have a good effect, though in Greek and Latin it must have had a bad one. Besides, one end of rhymes in modern poetry, is to distinguish it more effectually from prose: the Greeks and Romans distinguished theirs by the measure, and by the composition, upon which the genius of their languages allowed them to bestow innumerable graces, in respect of arrangement, harmony, and variety, whereof the best modern tongues, from the irregularity of their structure, particularly from their want of inflexion, are but moderately susceptible: and therefore, of rhyme, as a mark of distinction, our poetry may sometimes stand

notice of this peculiarity. Their ὁμοιοτελευτον seems to have been a coincidence of sound rather in the last words of contiguous clauses, than in the last syllables or letters of contiguous words. See Demet. Phaler. § 281.; and Rollin's Quintilian, lib. 9. cap. 3. § 2.

in need, though theirs did not. In fact we find, that blank verse, except where the want of rhyme is compensated, as it is in Milton, by the harmony and variety of the composition, can never have a good effect in our *heroick* poetry: of which any person may be satisfied, who looks into Trapp's Virgil, or who, by changing a word in each couplet, takes away the rhyme from any part of Pope's Homer. But the structure of the Miltonick numbers is so finely diversified, and so transcendently harmonious, that, in the perusal of Paradise Lost, we have no more reason to regret the want of rhyme, than, in reading the Essay on Man, or Dryden's Fables, to lament that they were not written in blank verse.

IV. Dignity and meanness united, or supposed to be united, in the same assemblage, form a copious source of ludicrous combination. Innumerable are the examples that might be given on this head, but I shall confine my remarks to a few of the most obvious.

1. Mean sentiments appearing unexpectedly in a serious argument, so as to form what is called an anticlimax, are often productive of laughter. Waller, in a magnificent encomium on the Summer Islands, provokes a smile instead of admiration, by a contrast of this kind.

what is called the poetical dialect;* and such are most words of foreign original, which though naturalized, are not in familiar use. 3. There are also certain phrases and words, which may properly enough be called *mean;* because used chiefly by persons of no learning or breeding, or by others on familiar occasions only,† or in order to express what is trifling or contemptible. Such are trite proverbs, colloquial oaths, and forms of compliment; the ungrammatical phrases of

* See Essay on Poetry, part 2. chap. 1. sect. 2.

† Castalio's translation of the Old Testament does great honour to his learning, but not to his taste. The quaintness of his Latin style betrays a deplorable inattention to the simple majesty of his original. In the Song of Solomon he is particularly injudicious; debasing the magnificence of the language and subject by *diminutives*, which, though expressive of *familiar endearment*, he should have known to be destitute of dignity, and therefore improper on solemn occasions. This incongruous mixture, of sublime ideas and words comparatively mean, has a very bad effect, and degrades the noblest poetry almost to the level of burlesque. "Mea columbula, ostende mihi tuum vulticulum; fac ut audiam tuam voculam; nam et voculam venustulam, et vulticulum habes lepidulum.—Cerviculam habes Davidicæ turris similem.—Cervicula quasi eburnea turricula.—Utinam esses mihi quasi fraterculus, qui meæ mammas materculæ suxisses.—Venio in meos hortulos, sororcula mea sponsa.—Ego dormio, vigilante meo corculo," &c.

conversation; the dialect peculiar to certain trades; the jargon of beggars, thieves, gamblers, and fops; foreign and provincial barbarisms, and the like. These, if intelligible, may be introduced in *burlesque* writing with good effect, as in *Hudibras* and the *History of John Bull;* but ought never to find a place in serious writing; nor even in the *mock heroick*, except perhaps in a short characteristical speech, like that of sir Plume in the *Rape of the Lock;** nor indeed in any literary work where elegance is expected. This *cant* style, as it is sometimes called, was very prevalent in England in the latter part of the last century; having been brought in by the courtiers of Charles the second, who, to show their contempt for the solemn character that had distinguished the preceding period, ran into the opposite extreme, and affected profligacy of manners, profaneness of talk, and a loose ungrammatical vulgarity of expression. L'Estrange is full of it, not only in his fables, where burlesque may be pardonable, but even in his translations of Josephus and Tacitus.† Echard, by a similar in-

* See canto 4. vers. 127.

† He makes the grave and sublime Tacitus speak of some gentlemen, "who had *feathered their nests* in the "civil war between Cesar and Pompey;" and tells us, that the emperor Vitellius was *lugged out of his hole* by those who came to kill him.

discretion, has transformed the elegant Terence into a writer of farce and buffoonery. Nay, Dryden himself, in one or two instances, and perhaps in more, has burlesqued both Homer and Virgil, by interlarding his translations with this beggarly dialect.* And some imprudent divines

* So heavy a charge against so great an author ought not to be advanced without proof. In Dryden's version of the first book of the Iliad, Jupiter addresses Juno in these words:

> My *household curse*, my *lawful plague*, the spy
> Of Jove's designs, his *other squinting eye*.

Homer, in the same book, says, "The gods were trou-"bled in the palace of Jove, when Vulcan the renown-"ed artificer began to address them in these words, "with a view to sooth his beloved mother, the white-"armed Juno:" which Dryden thus versifies:

> The *limping smith* observed the sadden'd feast,
> And *hopping here and there, himself a jest*,
> *Put in his word*, that neither might offend,
> To Jove obsequious, yet his mother's friend.

Homer has been blamed, not without reason, for degrading his gods into mortals; but Dryden has degraded them into blackguards. He concludes the book in a strain of buffoonery as gross as any thing in Hudibras:

> *Drunken* at last, and drowsy, they depart
> Each to his house, adorned with labour'd art

have employed it, where it is most pernicious, and absolutely intolerable, even in religion itself.

Rutherford's Letters, well known in North Britain, are notorious in this way; not so much

> Of the lame architect. The thundering god,
> Even he withdrew to rest, and *had his load;*
> His *sweeming head* to *needful* sleep *apply'd,*
> And Juno *lay unheeded* by his side.

The passage literally rendered is no more than this. "Now, when the shining light of the sun was gone "down, the other gods being inclined to slumber, de- "parted to their several homes, to where Vulcan, the "lame deity, renowned for ingenious contrivance, had "built for each a palace. And Olympian Jove, the thun- "derer, went to the bed where, when sleep came up- "on him, he was accustomed to repose. Thither ascend- "ing, he resigned himself to rest; and near him Juno "distinguished by the golden throne." It is said, that Dryden once intended to translate the whole Iliad. Taking this first book for a specimen, I am glad, both on Homer's account and on his own, that he did not. It is tainted throughout with a dash of burlesque, (owing not only to his choice of words, but also to his paraphrases and additions), and with so much of the profane cant of his age, that if we were to judge of the poet by the translator, we should imagine the Iliad to have been partly designed for a satire upon the clergy.

Virgil, in his ninth eclogue, puts these words in the mouth of an unfortunate shepherd.

> O Lycida, vivi pervenimus, advena nostri,
> Quod nunquam veriti sumus, ut possessor agelli

for the rudeness of the style in general, for that might be pardoned in a Scotch writer who lived one hundred and twenty years ago, as for the allusions and figures, which are inexcusably gross and groveling. A reader who is unacquainted with the character of Rutherford might imagine, that those letters must have been written with a view to ridicule every thing that is sacred. And though there is reason to believe the author had no bad meaning, one cannot without horrour see religion profaned by a phraseology which one would sooner expect from a profligate clown in an alehouse, than from a clergyman. Such performances are very detrimental to true piety; they pervert the ignorant, and encourage the

> Diceret, Hæc mea sunt, veteres migrate coloni.
> Nunc victi, tristes, quoniam fors omnia versat,
> Hos illi (quod nec bene vertat!) mittimus hædos.

It is strange that Dryden did not perceive the beautiful simplicity of these lines. If he had, he would not have written the following ridiculous translation.

> O Lycydas, at last
> The time is come I never thought to see,
> (Strange revolution for my farm and me),
> When the *grim captain* in a surly tone
> Cries out, *Pack up, ye rascals, and begone.*
> *Kick'd out, we set the best face on't we could,*
> And these two kids, t'appease his angry mood,
> I bear: of which *the furies give him good.*

profaneness of the scoffer. Nor let it be said, that they make religious truths intelligible to the vulgar: rather say, that they tend to make it appear contemptible. Indeed a preacher, who affects a display of metaphysical learning, or interlards his composition with terms of art or science, or with uncommon words derived from the Greek and Latin, must be little understood by unlettered hearers: but that is a fault which every preacher who has the instruction of his people at heart and is master of his language and subject, will carefully and easily avoid. For between plainness and meanness of expression there is a very wide difference. Plain words are universally understood, and may be used in every argument, and are especially requisite in all writings addressed to the people. Mean language has no standard, is different in different places, and is applicable to burlesque arguments only. Gulliver's Travels, or the Draper's Letters, are intelligible in every part of England; but the dialects of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Somersetshire, are hardly understood beyond the limits of these provinces. A sermon in broad Scotch would now seem ridiculous to a Scotch peasant, and withal be less intelligible than one of Swift or Atterbury's.

Few things in language have a more debasing

influence than provincial barbarisms; because we seldom hear them, except from illiterate people, and on familiar occasions.* Hence upon the principles here laid down, it might be presumed *a priori*, that to those who thoroughly understand them, they would be apt to appear ludicrous; especially when either the subject, or the condition of the speaker, gave ground to expect a more polite style. And this is so much the case, that

* There is an obvious difference between dialect and pronunciation. A man may be both learned and well-bred, and yet never get the better of his national accent. This may make his speech ungraceful, but will not render it ridiculous; it becomes ridiculous only when it is debased by those vulgarities that convey a mean idea of the speaker. Every Scotchman of taste is ambitious to avoid the solecisms of his native dialect. And this by care and study he may do, and be able even in familiar discourse, to command such a phraseology as, if committed to writing, would be allowed to be pure English. He may too so far divest himself of his national accent as to be perfectly intelligible, wherever the English language is understood. But the niceties of English pronunciation he cannot acquire, without an early and long residence among English people who speak well. It is however to be hoped, that in the next century this will not be so difficult. From the attention that has of late been paid to the study of the English tongue, the Scots have greatly improved both their pronunciation and their style within these last thirty years

in North Britain it is no uncommon thing to see a man obtain a character for jocularity, merely by speaking the vulgar broad Scotch. To write in that tongue, and yet write seriously, is now impossible; such is the effect of *mean* expressions applied to an *important* subject: so that if a Scotch merchant or man of business, were to write to his countryman in his native dialect, the other would conclude that he was in jest. Not that this language is *naturally* more ridiculous than others. While spoken and written at the court of Scotland, and by the most polite persons in the kingdom, it had all the dignity that any other tongue, equally scanty and uncultivated, could possess; and was a dialect of English, as the Dutch is of German, or the Portuguese of Spanish; that is, it was a language derived from and like another, but subject to its own laws, and regulated by the practice of those who writ and spoke it. But, for more than half a century past, it has, even by the Scots themselves, been considered as the dialect of the vulgar; the learned and polite having for the most part, adopted the English in its stead; a preference justly due to the superiour genius of that noble language, and the natural effect of the present civil constitution of Great Britain. And now, in Scotland, there is no such thing as a standard of the native tongue; nothing passes

for good language, but what is believed to be English; every county thinks its own speech preferable to its neighbour's, without entertaining any partiality for that of the chief town: and the populace of Edinburgh speak a dialect not more intelligible, nor less disagreeable, to a native of Buchan, than the dialect of Buchan is to a native of Edinburgh.

The greater part of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is written in a broad Scotch dialect. The sentiments of that piece are natural, the circumstances interesting; the characters well drawn, well distinguished, and well contrasted; and the fable has more probability than any other pastoral drama I am acquainted with. To an Englishman who had never conversed with the common people of Scotland, the language would appear only antiquated, obscure or unintelligible; but to a Scotchman who thoroughly understands it, and is aware of its vulgarity, it appears *ludicrous;* from the contrast between *meanness* of phrase, and *dignity* or *seriousness* of sentiment. This gives a farcical air even to the most affecting parts of the poem; and occasions an impropriety of a peculiar kind, which is very observable in the representation. And accordingly, this play, with all its merit, and with a strong national partiality in its

favour, has never given general satisfaction upon the stage.

I have finished a pretty full enumeration of examples; but am very far from supposing it so complete, as to exhibit every species of ludicrous absurdity. Nor am I certain, that the reader will be pleased with my arrangement, or even admit that all my examples have the ludicrous character. But slight inaccuracies, in an inquiry so little connected with practice, will perhaps be overlooked as not very material; especially when it is considered that the subject, though familiar, is both copious and delicate, and though frequently spoken of by philosophers in general terms, has never before been attempted, so far as I know, in the way of induction. At any rate, it will appear from what has been said, that the theory here adopted is plausible at least; and that the philosophy of laughter is not wholly unsusceptible of method. And they who may think fit to amuse themselves at any time with this speculation, whatever stress they may lay upon my reasoning, will perhaps find their account in my collection of examples. And, provided they substitute a more perfect theory of their own in its stead, I shall not be offended, if by means of these very examples they should find out and demonstrate the imperfection of mine.

CHAPTER III.

Limitations of the preceding Doctrine. Incongruity not Ludicrous, I. *When customary and common; nor,* II. *When it excites any powerful emotion in the beholder, as,* 1. *Moral Disapprobation,* 2. *Indignation or Disgust,* 3. *Pity, or,* 4. *Fear;* III. *Influence of Goodbreeding upon Laughter;* IV. *Of Similitudes, as connected with this subject;* V. *Recapitulation.*

THAT an opposition of relation and contrariety is often discernible in those things which we call ludicrous, seems now to be sufficiently proved. But does every such opposition or mixture of contrariety and relation, of suitableness and incongruity, of likeness and dissimilitude, provoke laughter? This requires further disquisition.

I. If an old Greek or Roman were to rise from his grave, and see the human head and shoulders overshadowed with a vast periwig; or were he to contemplate the native hairs of a fine gentleman arranged in the present form* part standing

* In the year 1764.

erect, as if their owner were beset with hobgoblins, and part by means of grease and meal consolidated into paste, he could hardly fail to be struck with the appearance: and I question, whether the features even of Heraclitus himself, or of the younger Cato, would not relax a little upon the occasion. For in this absurd imitation of nature, we have likeness coupled with dissimilitude, and imaginary grace with real deformity, and inconvenience sought after with eagerness, and at considerable expense. Yet in these fashions they who are accustomed to them do not perceive any thing ridiculous. Nay, were we to see a fine lady dressed according to the mode still extant in some old pictures, with her tresses all hanging about her eyes, in distinct and equal portions like a bunch of candles, and twisted into a hundred strange curls, we should certainly think her a laughable phenomenon; though the same object two centuries ago would have been gazed at with admiration and delight. There are few incongruities to which *custom* will not reconcile us.† Nay, so wonderfully ductile is the taste

† In the age of James the first, when fashion had consecrated the *pun* and *paronomasia*, the hearers of a quibbling preacher, were, I doubt not, both attentive and serious; as the universal prevalence of witticism,

of some people, that, in the various revolutions of fashion, they find the same thing *charming* while in vogue, which when obsolete is altogether *frightful*. Incongruity, therefore, in order to be ludicrous, must be in some measure uncommon.

even on solemn occasions, would almost annihilate its ludicrous effect. But it may be doubted, whether any audience in Great Britain would now maintain their gravity, if they were to be entertained with such a sermon, as *Sulton's Caution for the Credulous:* from which, for the reader's amusement, I transcribe the following passages:—"Here I have *undertaken* one who hath *over-*"*taken* many, a *Machiavillian*, (or rather a *matchless* "*villain*) one that professeth himself to be a *friend*, "when he is indeed a *fiend*.—His greatest *amity* is but "dissembled *enmity*.—His *ave* threatens a *væ;* and "therefore listen not to his treacherous *ave*, but heark-"en unto Solomon's *cave;* and though he speaketh fa-"vourably, believe him not.—Though I call him but a "*plain* flatterer, (for I mean to deal very *plainly* with "him) some compare him to a devil. If he be one, these "words of Solomon are a *spell* to *expel* this devil.—"*Wring* not my words, to *wrong* my meaning; I go not "about to crucifie the *sons* but the *sins* of men.—Some "flatter a man for their own private benefit:—this man's "heart thou hast in thy pocket; for if thou *find in thy* "*purse* to give him presently, he will *find in his heart* to "love thee everlastingly." *A Caution for the Credulous. By Edw. Sulton, Preacher. quarto, pp. 44. Aberdeen printed.* 1629. *Edinburgh reprinted,* 1696.

To this it will be objected, that those ludicrous passages in books, that have been many times laughed at by the same person, do not entirely lose their effect by the frequency of their appearance. But many circumstances concur to perpetuate the agreeable effect of those passages. We forget them in the intervals of reading, and thus they often become almost new to us: when we read them a second or third time, the remembrance of the former emotion may serve to heighten the present; when we read them in company, or hear them read, our emotions are enforced by sympathy; and all this while the wit or humour remains the same, unimpaired and unaffected by accidental associations. Whereas, on the other hand, there are many circumstances that tend in time to obliterate, or at least to soften, what at first might seem ridiculous in modes of conversation or dress. For things are not always agreeable or disagreeable in proportion to their intrinsick beauty or deformity; much will depend on extraneous and accidental connections: and, as men who live in society do daily acquire new companions, by whom their manners are in some degree tinctured; so whatever is driven about in the tide of human affairs is daily made a part of some new assemblage, and daily contracts new qualities from those things

that chance associates with it. A vast periwig is in itself perhaps somewhat ridiculous; but the person who wears it may be a venerable character. These two objects, being constantly united, derive new qualities from each other: the wig may at first raise a smile at the expense of the wearer, but the wearer will at last render even his wig respectable. The fine lady may have a thousand charms, every one of which is more than sufficient to make us fond of the little irregularities of her temper, and much more to reconcile us to any awkward disposition of her ringlets or apparel. And the fine gentleman, whose hair in its economy so little resembles that of Milton's Adam,* may be what no ungracefulness of shape or feature will ever expose to ridicule, a faithful friend, a valiant soldier, an agreeable companion, or a dutiful son. Our natural love of society, the various and substantial pleasures we derive from that source, and our proneness to imitation, not to mention the power of custom, soon reconcile us to the manners of those with whom we live; and therefore cannot fail to recommend their external appearance.

* ——— hyacinthin locks
Round from his parted forelock manly hung
Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad.
Paradise Lost, book 4.

All the nations in Europe, and perhaps all the nations on earth, are, in some particulars of dress or deportment, mutually ridiculous to one another; and to the vulgar of each nation, or to those who have never been from home, nor conversed with strangers, the peculiarities of foreign behaviour are most apt to appear ludicrous. Persons who, by travel or extensive acquaintance, are become familiar with foreign manners, see nothing ridiculous in them: and it is therefore reasonable, that a disposition to laugh at the dress and gestures of a stranger (provided these be unaffected on his part) should be taken for a mark of rusticity, as well as of illnature. Tragedies written in rhyme, or pronounced in recitative, may be thought ridiculous, when one has seen but little of them; but it is easy to give a reason why they should be highly and seriously interesting in France and Italy. That cannot be ludicrous, that must, on the contrary, be the object of admiration, to which we have been accustomed to annex ideas of festivity and leisure, of beauty and magnificence, which we have always heard spoken of as a matter of universal concern, and with which from our infancy we have been acquainted.

May we not, then, set it down, as a character of ludicrous absurdity, that it is in some degree *new and surprising?* Witticisms that appear to be

studied give offence, instead of entertainment: and nothing sets off a merry tale to so great advantage as an unpromising simplicity of style and manner. By virtue of this negative accomplishment, men of moderate talents have been known to contribute more to the mirth of the company, than those could ever do, who, with superiour powers of genius, were more artful in their language, and more animated in their pronunciation. Conciseness, too, when we intend a laughable conclusion; is an essential requisite in telling a story; nor should any man attempt to be diffuse in humorous narrative, but he whose wit and eloquence are very great. A joke is always the worse for being expected: the longer it is withheld, after we are made to look for it, the more will its volatile spirit lose by evaporation. The greatest masterpieces in ludicrous writing would become insipid, if too frequently perused; *decies repetita placebit* is a character that belongs to few of them: and I believe every admirer of Cervantes and Fielding would purchase at a considerable price the pleasure of reading Tom Jones and Don Quixote for the first time. It is true, a good comedy, well performed, may entertain the same person for many successive evenings; but some varieties are always expected, and do generally take place, in each new representation;

and though the wit and the business of every scene should come at last to be distinctly remembered, there will still be something in the art of the player, which one would wish to see repeated.

II. But as every surprising incongruity is not ludicrous, we must pursue our speculations a little further.

1. A more striking absurdity there is not in the whole universe, than a vitious man. His frame and faculties are human: his moral nature, originally inclined to rectitude, is sadly perverted, and applied to purposes not less unsuitable to humanity, than dancing is to a bear, or a sword and snuffbox to a monkey. He judges of things, not by their proper standard, nor as they are in themselves, but as they appear through the medium of his own variable and artificial appetites; as the clown is said to have applied his candle to the sundial to see how the night went. He overlooks and loses real good, in order to attain that of which he knows not whether it be good, or whether it be attainable; like the dog in the fable, losing the substance by catching at a shadow. He justifies his conduct to his own mind, by arguments whereof he sees the fallacy; like the thief endeavouring to enrich himself by stealing out of his own pocket. He purposes to take up and reform, whenever his appetites are fully gratified;

like the rustick, whose plan was, to wait till the water of the river should run by, and then pass over dryshod. He attempts what is beyond his reach, and is ruined by the attempt; like the frog that burst by endeavouring to blow herself up to the size of an ox. In a word, more blunders and absurdities, than ever the imitators of Esop ascribed to the beasts, or Joe Millar to the Scots and Irish, might easily be traced out in the conduct of the wicked man. And yet, vice, however it may *surprise* by its novelty or enormity, is by no means an object of laughter, even to those who perceive in it all the absurdities I have specified. We pity, and in some cases we abhor, the perpetrator; but our mind must be depraved like his own, if we laugh at him.

But can pity, abhorrence, and risibility, be excited by the same object, and at the same time? Can the painful passions of hatred and horrour, and the pleasurable feeling that accompanies laughter, exist at one and the same instant in a well informed mind? Can that amuse and delight us by its absurdity, which our moral principle, armed with the authority of heaven, declares to be shameful, and worthy of punishment? It is impossible: emotions, so different in their nature, and so unequal in power, cannot dwell together; the weaker must give place to the stronger. And

which is the weaker? moral disapprobation, or the ludicrous sentiment? Are the pleasures of wit and humour a sufficient counterpoise to the pangs of a wounded spirit? Are a jest and a generous action equally respectable? In affliction, in sickness, at the hour of death, which is the better comforter, an approving conscience, or a buffoon? the remembrance of a well spent life, or of our connection with a witty society? The glow worm and the sun are not less susceptible of comparison. It would seem then, that those absurdities in ourselves or others, which provoke the disapprobation of the moral faculty, cannot be ludicrous; because in a sound mind they give rise to emotions inconsistent with, and far more powerful than, that whereof laughter is the outward indication.

But what do you say of those *comedies* and *satires*, which put us out of conceit with our vices, by exposing them to laughter? Such performances, surely cannot be all unnatural; and if they are not, may not vice be made a ludicrous object? Our follies, and vices of less enormity, may, I grant, be exhibited in very laughable colours; and if we can be prevailed on to see them in a *ridiculous* light, that is both to *laugh at* and to *despise* them, our reformation may be presumed to be in some forwardness: and hence

the utility of *ridicule*, as an instrument of moral culture. But if we only *laugh at* our faults, without *despising* them, that is, if they appear *ludicrous* only, and not *ridiculous*, it is to be feared, that we shall be more inclined to love than to hate them: and hence the imperfection of those writings, in which human follies are made the subject of mere pleasantry and amusement. I cannot admit, that to a sound mind undisguised immorality can ever cease to be digustful; though I allow, that the guilty person may possess qualities sufficient to render him agreeable upon the whole. This indeed happens too often in life; and it is this that makes bad company so fatally ensnaring. This too, the comick muse, laying aside the character of a moralist, and assuming that of a pimp, has too often introduced upon the stage. But, however profligate a poet may be, we are not to suppose, that downright wickedness can ever in itself be a laughable object to any decent assembly of rational beings. The *Provoked Wife*, the *Old Bachelor*, the *Beggar's Opera*, are dangerous plays no doubt, and scandalously immoral; but it is the wit and the humour, not the villany, of Brute, Belmour, and Macheath, that makes the audience merry; and Vanburgh, Congreve, and Gay, are blamable, not because they have made beastliness, robbery,

lying, adultery, ludicrous, (for that I believe was not in their power) but because they adorn their respective reprobates with engaging qualities to seduce others into imitation. But may not criminal adventures be so disguised and misrepresented, as to extort a smile even from a man of good principles? This may be, no doubt; for, as the forms of falsehood are infinite, it is not easy to say, how many strange things may be effected by misrepresentation. While the moral faculty is inactive or neuter, the ludicrous sentiment may operate; but to have a just sense of the enormity of a crime, and at the same time to laugh at it, seems impossible, or at least unnatural: and therefore, we may venture to repeat, that moral disapprobation is a more powerful emotion than laughter; and consequently that both, as their natures are inconsistent, cannot at the same time prevail in a well informed mind. "They are fools who laugh at sin;" and, whatever may be the practice of profligates, or of good men under the influence of a temporary infatuation, the common feelings of mankind do not warrant so gross an impropriety.

As to *satire*, we must observe, that it is of two sorts, the comick and the serious; that human foibles are the proper objects of the former, and vices and crimes of the latter; and that it

ought to be the aim of the satirist to make those ridiculous, and these detestable. I know not how it comes to pass, that the comick satire should be so much in vogue; but I find that the generality of criticks are all for the moderation and smiling graces of the courtly Horace, and exclaim against the vehemence and vindictive zeal of the unmannerly Juvenal. They may as well blame Sophocles for not adopting the style of Aristophanes, and insist that Cicero should have arraigned Verres in the language of Anacreon. Nor do Horace and Juvenal admit of comparison in this respect,* any more than a chapter of the Tale of a Tub can be compared with one of the Saturday papers in the Spectator. These poets had different views, and took different subjects; and therefore it was right that there should be a difference in their manner of writing. Had Juvenal made a jest of the crimes of his contemporaries, all the world would have called him a bad writer and a bad man. And had Horace, with the severity of Juvenal, attacked the

* Nor indeed in any respect. Different in their views, and in their subjects, they differ no less in style. That of Horace (in his satires) is indeed superlatively elegant, but easy, familiar, and apparently artless. The style of Juvenal is elaborate, harmonious, vehement, poetical, and often sublime.

impertinence of coxcombs, the pedantry of the stoicks, the fastidiousness of luxury, and the folly of avarice, he would have proved himself ignorant of the nature of things, and even of the meaning of his own precept:

——— Adsit
Regula, peccatis quæ pœnas irroget æquas,
Ne scutica dignum horribili sectere flagello.*

That neither Horace nor Juvenal ever endeavoured to make us laugh at crimes, I will not affirm; but for every indiscretion of this kind they are to be condemned, not imitated. And this is not the general character of their satire. Horace laughed at the follies and foibles of mankind; so far he did well. But Juvenal (if his indecencies had died with himself) might, as a moral satirist, be said to have done better. Fired with honest indignation at the unexampled degeneracy of his age; and, disdaining that tameness of expression and servility of sentiment, which in some cases are infallible marks of a dastardly soul, he dragged vice from the bower

* Let rules be fix'd that may our rage contain,
And punish faults with a proportion'd pain:
And do not flay him, who deserves alone
A whipping for the fault that he has done.
Creech.

of pleasure and from the throne of empire, and exhibited her to the world, not in a ludicrous attitude, but in her genuine form; a form of such loathsome ugliness, and hideous distortion, as cannot be viewed without horrour.

We repeat therefore, that wickedness is no object of laughter; the disapprobation of conscience, and the ludicrous sentiment, being emotions inconsistent in their nature, and very unequal in power. In fact, the latter emotion is generally weak, and never should be strong; while the former in every mind ought to be, and in every sound mind is, the most powerful principle of the human constitution.

2. Further: When sacred things are profaned by meanness of allusion and language, the incongruity will not force a smile from a well disposed person, except it surprise him in an unguarded moment. I could quote, from Blackmore and Rutherford, thoughts as incongruous as any that ever disgraced literature, but which are too shocking to raise any other emotions than horrour and indignation. From an author far more respectable I shall give one instance, to show how debasing it is, even to a great genius, to become a flatterer.

> False heroes, made by flattery so,
> Heaven can strike out, like sparkles, at a blow;

But, ere a prince is to perfection brought,
He costs Omnipotence a second thought:
With toil and sweat,
With hardening cold and forming heat,
The Cyclops did their work repeat,
Before the impenetrable shield was wrought.*

Anger too is generally, while it lasts, a preservative against risible impressions; whence great laughers are supposed to be goodnatured. While all England laughed at the heroes of the Dunciad, Colley Cibber and his brethren were, I dare say, perfectly serious. And if the gravity of Edmund Curll was overcome by that "account "of his poisoning," which no other person's gravity could ever withstand, he must have possessed a great deal of philosophy or insensibility. Socrates, in the Athenian theatre, joining in the laugh that Aristophanes had raised against him, is spoken of by old authors as a singular instance of selfcommand: which I mention, not with a view to compare the sage with the bookseller, but to show that anger and laughter were supposed to have the same influence on each other two thousand years ago, which they are found to have at this present time.

3. Even pity alone is, for the most part, of

* Dryden's Threnodia Augustalis.

power sufficient to control risibility. To one who could divest himself of that affection, a wooden leg might perhaps appear ludicrous, from the striking contrast of incongruity and similitude: and in fact we find that Butler has made both himself and his readers merry with an implement of this sort that pertained to the expert Crowdero; and that Smollet has taken the same freedom, for the same purpose, with his friend lieutenant Hatchway. But he who forgets humanity so far, as to smile at such a memorial of misfortune in a living person, will be blamed by every good man. We expect, because from experience we know it is natural, that pity should prevail over the ludicrous emotion.

"Many a Scotch presbyterian (says Hutche-
"son, in his *Reflections upon Laughter*) has been
"put to it to preserve his gravity, upon hearing
"the application of scripture made by his coun-
"tryman Dr. Pitcairn, as he observed a crowd
"in the streets about a mason, who had fallen
"along with his scaffold, and was overwhelmed
"with the ruins of the chimney which he had
"been building, and which fell immediately after
"the fall of the poor mason: Blessed are the dead
"which die in the Lord, for they rest from their
"labours and their works follow them." For the honour of the learned physician's memory, I

hope the story is not true. Such wantonness of impiety, and such barbarity of insult, is no object of laughter, but of horrour. And I confess, I should have no good opinion of any presbyterian, or of any person, who could find it difficult to preserve his gravity on hearing it told.

4. Fear is a passion, which would I think on almost any occasion repress laughter. To conceal one's fear, one might feign a laugh; and any passion in extreme may produce a similar convulsion: but nobody laughs at that which makes him seriously afraid, however, incongruous its appearance may be. A friend of mine dreamed that he saw the devil, and awoke in a great fright. He described the phantasm very minutely; and sure a more ridiculous one was never imagined; but, instead of laughter, his countenance betrayed every symptom of horrour; for the dream had made a strong impression, nor could he for many months think of it without uneasiness. It is strange, that the common people, who are so much afraid of the devil, should fancy him to be of a ludicrous figure, with horns, a tail, and cloven feet, united to the human form. Sir Thomas Brown, with no little plausibility, derives this conceit from the Rabbins.* But the Romans, from their ascribing un-

* Pseudodoxia Epidemica, book 5. chap. 21.

accountable fear to the agency of Pan, whose supposed figure was the same, appear to have been possessed with a similar superstition, in whatever way they came by it. Satyrs, however, were believed to be merry beings; always piping and dancing, and frisking about, cracking their jokes, and throwing themselves into antick attitudes; and indeed when they are introduced in a picture, they generally convey somewhat of a ludicrous impression, as the sight of such an animal, supposed to be harmless, could hardly fail to do.

III. Goodbreeding lays many restraints upon laughter, and upon all other emotions that display themselves externally. And this leads me to speak of those refinements in wit and humour, which take place in society, according as mankind improve in polite behaviour.

Lord Froth in the play called the Double Dealer,† and lord Chesterfield, in a book of letters which some think might have borne the same appellation, declaim vehemently against laughter: "There is nothing more unbecoming "a person of quality, than to laugh; 'tis such a "vulgar thing: every body can laugh." Influenced by a doctrine of so high authority, many of my readers may, I am afraid, have been inclined

† Act 1. scene 4.

to think hardly of me, for analyzing vulgar witticisms, and inquiring into the nature of a phenomenon, which can no longer show its face in genteel company. And therefore it may be proper for me to say a word or two in defence, first of myself, and secondly of my subject.

In behalf of myself I can only plead, that laughter, however unfashionable, is a real and a natural expression of a certain human emotion, or inward feeling; and has been so, for any thing I know to the contrary, ever since the days of Adam: that therefore it is as liable to the cognisance of philosophy, as any other natural fact; and that we are to judge of it, rather from its unrestrained energies, than from the appearances it may assume under the control of affectation or delicacy. The foot of a Chinese beauty is whiter, no doubt, and prettier, than that of a Scotch highlander; yet I would advise those who are curious to know the parts and proportions of that limb, to contemplate the clown rather than the lady. To be master of one's own temper, is a most desirable thing; and much more pleasant it is to live with such as are so, than among those who, without caution or disguise, speak, and look, and act, according to the impulse of passion: but the philosopher who would analyze anger, pride, jealousy, or any other vio-

lent emotion, will do well to take its phenomena rather from the latter than from the former. Just so, in tracing out the cause of laughter, I did not think it necessary or expedient to confine my observation to those pleasantries which the *sentimental* critick would honour with a simper: it suited my purpose better to attend to examples, which, whether really laughed at or no, the generality of mankind would acknowledge to be laughable.

That all men are not equally inclined to laughter; and that some may be found, who rarely indulge in it themselves, and actually dislike it in others, cannot be denied. But they are greatly mistaken, who suppose this character to be the effect of good breeding, or peculiar to high life. In the cottage you will find it, as well as in the drawing room. Nor is profuse laughter peculiar to low life: it is a weakness incident to all stations; though I believe, that among the *wiser* sort, both of clowns and of quality, it may be less common.

But the present inquiry does not so much regard laughter itself, as that pleasurable emotion or sentiment, whereof laughter is the outward sign, and which may be intensely felt by those who do not laugh at all; even as the person who never weeps may yet be very tenderhearted. Nay as the keenest and most rational sorrow is

not the most apt to express itself in tears; so the most admirable performances in wit and humour are not perhaps the most laughable; admiration being one of those powerful emotions that occasionally engross the whole soul, and suspend the exercise of its faculties. And therefore, whatever judgment the reader may have formed concerning the lawfulness, expediency, or propriety, of this visible and audible convulsion called Laughter, my account of the cause of that internal emotion which generally gives rise to it, may be allowed to be pardonable, if it shall be found to be just. Nor does lord Chesterfield, as I remember, object to this emotion, nor to a smile as the outward expression of it, so long as the said smile is not suffered to degenerate into an open laugh.

Goodbreeding is the art of pleasing those with whom we converse. Now we cannot please others, if we either show them what is unpleasing in ourselves, or give them reason to think that we perceive what is unpleasing in them. Every emotion, therefore, that would naturally arise from bad qualities in us, or from the view of them in others, and all those emotions in general which our company may think too violent, and cannot sympathize with, nor partake in, goodbreeding requires that we suppress. Laughter, which is

either too profuse or too obstreperous, is an emotion of this kind: and therefore, a man of breeding will be careful not to laugh much longer, or much oftener than others; nor to laugh at all, except where it is probable that the jest may be equally relished by the company. These, and other restraints peculiar to polished life, have, by some writers, been represented as productive of fraud, hypocrisy, and a thousand other crimes, from which the honest, open, and undesigning savage is supposed to be entirely free. But, were this a fit place for stating the comparison, we could easily prove, that the restraints of good-breeding render society comfortable, and, by suppressing the outward energy of intemperate passions, tend not a little to suppress those passions themselves: while the unbridled liberty of savage life, gives full play to every turbulent emotion, keeps the mind in continual uproar, and disqualifies it for those improvements and calm delights, that result from the exercise of the rational and moral faculties.

But to return. The more we are accustomed to any set of objects, the greater delicacy of discernment we acquire in comparing them together, and estimating their degree of excellence. By studying many pictures one may become a judge of painting; by attending to the ornaments and

proportions of many buildings, one acquires a taste in architecture; by practising musick, we improve our sense of harmony; by reading many poems, we learn to distinguish the good from the bad. In like manner, by being conversant in works of wit and humour, and by joining in polite conversation, we refine our taste in ridicule, and come to undervalue those homelier jokes that entertain the vulgar. What improves individuals will in time improve nations. Plautus abounds in pleasantries that were the delight of his own and of the following age, but which at the distance of one hundred and fifty years, Horace scruples not to censure for their inurbanity.* And we find not a few even in Shakspeare (notwithstanding the great superiority of his genius) at which a critick of these days would be less inclined to laugh than to shake his head. Nay in the time of Charles the second, many things passed upon the English stage for excellent humour, which would now be intolerable. And thus it is, that we are enabled to judge of the politeness of nations, from the delicacy of their comick writers; and of the breeding and literature of individual men from their turn of humour, from their favourite jokes.

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 270—275.

and stories, and from the very sound, duration and frequency, of their laughter.

The conversation of the common people, though not so smooth, nor so pleasing, as that of the better sort, has more of the wildness and strong expression of nature. The common people speak and look what they think, bluster and threaten when they are angry, affect no sympathies which they do not feel, and when offended are at no pains to conceal their dissatisfaction. They laugh when they perceive any thing ludicrous, without much deference to the sentiments of their company; and, having little relish for delicate humour, because they have been but little used to it, they amuse themselves with such pleasantry as in the higher ranks of life would offend by its homeliness. Yet it may be ludicrous notwithstanding: as those passions in a clown or savage may be natural, which in the polite world men are very careful to suppress.

IV. Tropes and figures introduce into serious writing a variety of disproportionate images; which however do not provoke laughter, when they are so contrived as to raise some other emotion of greater authority. To illustrate this by examples taken from every species of trope and figure, is not necessary, and would be tedious. I shall confine my remarks to the similitude or

comparison; which is a very common figure, and contributes, more perhaps, than any other, to render language emphatical, picturesque and affecting to the fancy.

Every similitude implies two things: the idea to be illustrated, which I call the *principal idea;* and the object alluded to, for the purpose of illustration. Now if between these two there be a considerable inequality; if the one be mean and the other dignified, or if the one be of much greater dignity than the other; there may be reason to apprehend (supposing our theory just) that, by their appearing in one assemblage, a mixture of relation and contrariety may be produced, sufficient to render the comparison ludicrous; of relation, arising from the likeness; of contrariety, arising from the disproportion. And that this is often the case, we have seen already. But when Homer compares a great army to a flight of cranes, Hector to a rock, Ajax to an ass, and Ulysses covered with leaves to a bit of live coal raked up among embers, the similitudes, for all their incongruity, are quite serious; at least they convey no risible impression to a reader of taste when perusing the poem. By attending a little to this matter we shall perhaps be able to throw new light on our argument.

Similitudes, ranged according to their connec-

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